

POMEROY ABBEY

POMEROY ABBEY.

A Romance.

BY

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‘EAST LYNN,’ ‘THE BANNINGS,’ ‘JOHNNY LUDLOW,’ ETC.

Fortieth Thousand.



LONDON.

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1896.

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LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

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PART THE FIRST.



POMEROY ABBEY.

CHAPTER I.

JOAN POMEROY.

NEVER was there a more gloomy structure than that of the old Abbey of Pomeroy, with its grey walls, overgrown in places with lichen and other mosses, its narrow Gothic casements, and its time-worn towers. It was in keeping with the scenery around. Situated on a wild part of the coast of England, it was flanked by bleak and bold rocks on the one side, and a dark forest on the other. Not that the trees were very close to the abbey; they were considerably removed from it, forming, as it were, a background in the distance. The abbey, looking towards the sea, faced the east; and from its front descended a gentle hill, where a few houses, most of them very poor and humble, were honoured with the title of the village, taking its name from their site, "Abbeyland;" for the houses were built on lands belonging to the abbey. This hill wound round to the right, and led onwards to the dark and gloomy forest.

In days gone by, in the time of the Norman kings, this place had been the stronghold of the de Pomeroy, who were noted warriors. Then, gradually, they seem to have dwindled away and disappeared, and the abbey for a century or two was the abode of a religious order of monks. After that, it had come again into the hands of the Pomeroy, who professed to be lineal descendants of the ancient family, and who in fact were so. They retained their original faith, that of the Church of Rome, but dropped the "de" before

their name. The reigning chief of the abbey was called the Lord of Pomeroiy ; a privilege bestowed upon the family, according to popular belief, by one of our Norman kings.

But the Pomeroy's themselves accounted for it in a different manner. Tradition ran—and they and others believed it to be true—that the portion of land on which the abbey and its demesnes were situated had once been an island—the Island of Pomeroiy. On this the Pomeroy's had held sway as its absolute lords ; and had hence derived their title of the Lords of Pomeroiy. Since then, ages ago, the sea had retreated and the island became part of the main land ; but they still retained their title, and were likely to retain it. The reader understands that it was no title conferred by law or monarch ; it was merely conceded in courtesy, somewhat as a landed proprietor in Scotland is styled the laird. Nothing could move their own faith that they had as much right to it as has the premier peer of England to his dukedom.

The abbey was built in the form of a quadrangle ; a solid square stone building with a turret at each corner. The massive iron entrance-gates stood in the middle of the front or east pile. Entering these gates, and passing their dark, spacious archway, to the square opening or quadrangle that lay in the centre of the building, we see how large it is. Each side contains rooms sufficient for a numerous household. Standing with our faces to the entrance, the chief, or east pile lies before us, and its corner turret, to our left as we stand, is called the East Tower. The north and west wings lie between their respective towers ; and the south wing, lying to our right between the west and south towers, brings us again to the front and starting-point. Of these various piles, or wings, only the front and north are inhabited at present, though all (excepting the west) are more or less furnished for occupation.

The rooms in the west wing, and more particularly those in the west tower, have the reputation of being haunted ; and for long past no one has inhabited them. It should also be said that this west wing, though apparently as large as the other wings to us who stand in the open quadrangle

below, is deceptive. For it is not half the width of the other wings; and the rooms, instead of being numerous, are few, and all of them look out upon the abbey itself, and the quadrangle it encloses, there being no windows whatever at the back. As to the quadrangle, with its grassy flooring, if the term may be allowed, it looks exactly like a gloomy graveyard enclosed by cloisters. All round the quadrangle, between the abbey and the grass, lie roofed cloisters supported by pillars; their casements are unglazed and open to the quadrangle; doors here and there lead from them into the quadrangle, as they do from the cloisters into the house.

If there were a window looking out to the back in the west wing, and we could take our stand at it, we should gaze upon a wide expanse of wood and dale. To the right lies the chapel, surmounted by its quaint cross, and the graveyard beside it. Near the graveyard is the little house inhabited by the priest, Father Andrew, who shrives the abbey and the village and the neighbourhood in general, for nearly every one is of the old faith. Beyond are the stables and coach-houses. Some miles further off may be seen the chimneys of a large building rising against the horizon; they belong to a convent. It has existed for centuries, having been spared the destruction which so many other religious communities underwent in troublous times, though a portion of it once had to be rebuilt after a fire. It is of a rigid order, and is an educational establishment as well as a convent. A few houses nestling within their own grounds may be observed, scattered here and there in the distance: sundry good Roman Catholic families inhabit them, drawn to the neighbourhood originally by the convent, by the far-famed abbey and its strictly Roman Catholic owners.

Rather to our left, and very near the abbey, stands a small, round stone building, grey and old; it is covered with moss like the abbey, and is called the keep. A slope of green grass descends from it somewhat abruptly to a low level dell or hollow; and then the ground gently rises again to the abbey walls. At present this keep is vacant; but it has occasionally been inhabited by some faithful

retainer of the family when he has grown too old for service. It is said that the present lord intends his own man, Jerome, to retire to it later. On this west side the abbey has no entrance whatever. Neither has the south side any outer entrance; if you want to enter you must travel round to the front-gates. On the north side lie the garden and grounds, which are extensive.

Hugh, Lord of Pomeroy, the present head of the family, had two daughters and four sons: Guy, Rupert, George, and Leolin; Guy of course being the heir. George, Captain Pomeroy, was with his regiment in Ireland, though he had recently been sojourning at the abbey; in fact, as his father told him, he seemed to be always getting leave of absence and coming home. Leolin was on the continent, an attaché at one of our embassies. Guy and Rupert were at home; neither had any profession or calling. Guy was the heir; and Rupert had come into a fair fortune when he was of age, bequeathed by his mother, because he was the second son, though it was well known that her favourite son was the third, George. The rest thought it unfair that Rupert should have this money, Guy especially; but the Lady of Pomeroy had so left it in her will, and nothing could be changed after her death. It might have been just as well that Rupert had not inherited the bequest. He had hastened to London, to Paris, and to other gay places, spending the money right and left. When it was all gone, and more to it, for which he was in debt thick and threefold, back he came to the abbey and there took up his abode. That was a twelvemonth ago, and he was still here.

Guy and Rupert Pomeroy were remarkably tall, fine men, just of a height, nearly six feet three, and alike in figure. They both possessed the high, handsome features of the Pomeroyes, the bright brown hair, and the deep-grey eyes; but there the resemblance apparently ended. Guy was of a pale, almost ghastly complexion; his features, as well formed as Rupert's, were rendered plain by their exceedingly stern expression, and by his possessing what is called a hare-lip, all efforts to close which had failed in infancy. Rupert's complexion was more fresh and beautiful than is often owned

by man, the expression of his face was winning, though somewhat free, and his mouth was one of great sweetness. In voice also they differed: Guy's being deep and harsh, Rupert's pleasant as music.

It was a bright summer morning, and the breakfast-cloth was laid in the usual room; a small apartment on the first floor, that looked towards the front of the abbey. Many of the rooms on the ground-floor were given over to the servants: and the windows of all were protected outside by cross-bars of iron. Standing at the narrow open casement of this breakfast-room, while waiting for her father and brothers, was Miss Pomeroy, gazing out upon the old familiar features, which she had not seen for so long: the rocks, the straggling village, and a large white house nearly hidden by trees, which lay half-way up the hill beyond. She had returned home the previous evening from an absence of eight months. Some years ago her sister Isabel had married the Honourable Henry Capel, and had already more children than she cared to count. Joan often went to stay with her, but had never remained away so long before. She had been named Joan after a certain Dame Joan de Pomeroy, famous for her beauty in the reign of King John. Poor Joan—this Joan—was plain, tall and angular, her hair very dark, and her complexion nearly olive; but her features were good. She was twenty-nine this year; her sister Isabel, the eldest of the family, being one year older. Rupert entered.

"What are you looking at, Joan?"

"Not at anything in particular. Just then I was watching the smoke curling up from the White House. How do you get on with its inmates, Rupert? Have you become intimate with them?"

"Guy has."

"Guy!"

"He and the lord are there often. Indeed, I began to think that we were going to be presented, gratis, with a lady-in-law——"

"Rupert!" interrupted Joan, in a tone of rebuke.

"Or, step-lady—how runs it?" continued the unmoved

Rupert. "Until I found that the play lay in a different direction. The Lord and Mrs. Wylde were only courting for their children."

Joan drew up her head. "As if papa would condescend to anything of the kind, Rupert! Tell me what you mean."

"The son-and-heir is to settle," cried Rupert; "so runs the programme; and——"

"Guy cannot afford it. You have all been too extravagant for him to think of marrying; papa has often told him so. Two households in the abbey would double the present expenses."

"I should like to have a guinea for every superfluous word you drop in a day, Joan," laughed Rupert Pomeroy, who was the essence of good temper. "Guy will afford an establishment—if he gets the young lady. She has five-and-twenty thousand pounds—to be paid down on her wedding-day."

"Are you speaking of the mother or the daughter?"

"Well done, Joan! The mother is double Guy's age—or getting on for it. I said on the wedding-day."

"But—will—she, the daughter, have Guy?" slowly and doubtfully ejaculated Miss Pomeroy.

Rupert opened another of the narrow casements, and put his head out. He whistled to one of his pointers, which was frolicking below with the gamekeeper, Gaunt.

"Rupert! Rupert!" exclaimed his sister, petulantly, "you know when I want to hear a thing I must hear it. I say will Alice Wylde accept Guy?"

Rupert drew in his head. "You had better ask that of Guy himself."

"Is it true that she will have so large a sum?"

"Quite true. Her father was in India: a nabob—or rajah—or merchant—something they make fortunes at, out there: and she inherits it. There will be another twenty-five thousand when her mother dies; or more."

"She will never have Guy: she is too beautiful."

"Pretty women often marry ugly men, and——. Hush!" broke off Rupert: "here he comes, the son-and-heir."

Guy Pomeroy was heard outside, talking. His temper had

made him not loved by his brothers and sisters, over whom he assumed too much authority. But the lord doted on him. In Guy he saw his son-and-heir: and his constant allusions to Guy's being so, had caused the rest to apply the term to Guy derisively. Haughty, arrogant, and fearful spendthrifts, the Pomeroy's, from the lord downwards, had outrun their income; but this was not known to the world; and Guy, between whom and his father there existed entire confidence, had reached the age of eight-and-twenty without thought of marrying. "You must wait until I'm gone, Guy," the lord sometimes said to him; "you'll have the whole then." Whilst things were in this state, the White House changed its tenants, and became inhabited by the rich widow and daughter of Mr. Wylde.

But not for the sake of her fortune did Guy Pomeroy think of sacrificing his liberty: that the money may have added weight to the inducement, was probable, but the fresh beauty of Alice Wylde had caught his eye and heart. When those cold-natured men, such as Guy, do love they love passionately: and with an impassioned fervour that is not often equalled had Guy Pomeroy learnt to love Alice Wylde. Rupert did not explain this to his sister; he parried her questions, and seemed to treat the whole as a joke to be laughed at.

"I hear George has been at home again," she resumed.

"George? Yes, he came soon after you left home, I think; he stayed for some months."

"I wonder he likes to idle away so much of his time—and I wonder he gets the leave to do it," remarked Joan. "He cannot find much amusement here, I should think. But George was always idly inclined, and down here he is of course relieved from duty."

As she spoke, Guy Pomeroy entered. Joan went up to him and they kissed each other: they had not previously met since her return. Guy took his seat at the breakfast-table, and motioned to her to do the same.

"Guy," she began, as she obeyed him, with little regard to his feelings or to her own good manners, "Rupert says you wish to marry Miss Wylde. Will she have you?"

A hot flush illumined Guy's white cheek; proving, of itself, how very deep his love had gone. He drew himself up haughtily.

"Let Rupert concern himself with his fishing and his shooting, and his other—more questionable—sports: but let him not concern himself with me."

He rang the bell as he spoke; Rupert, still looking from the casement, appeared not to hear. Jerome came in, the lord's personal attendant; a faithful serving-man over fifty years old.

"The lord breakfasts in his room," said Guy.

"Yes, sir, I know it," replied Jerome. "He has slept badly."

Joan was busy with the breakfast-table. She could not domineer over Guy, as she did over Rupert: not that the latter heeded her domineering, for he was good-tempered and careless. Once, when Guy had declined to tell her something she wished to know, and she had teased him to anger, he had struck her. She said no more now about Alice Wylde, but let the conversation drift to general subjects, and the breakfast passed in peace.

The meal over, she went up to her father. A grand, tall old man, with a grey, handsome face, and grey hair. Now that Joan saw him by daylight, she noticed how ill and worn he looked. He was slowly eating his breakfast at a small round table drawn to the fire in his own sitting-room.

"Papa, you don't look well."

"No. I can't get over that last attack of mine, child."

"And you have a fire! It is a very warm day."

"I never feel warm now. There, let my ailments alone, Joan. Talk of something else."

"Papa, is Guy to marry Alice Wylde?"

The lord looked up. "Who has made you so wise?"

"Rupert."

"It is no business of Rupert's."

"Papa, I do not suppose she would have Guy."

"Not have Guy! I can tell you that an alliance with the future Lord of Pomeroy is what many a young lady, far higher in position and lineage than she, would kneel for.

She and Mrs. Wylde see it in the right light, and are eager for it. Do you think that so strange a thing, Joan?"

"Well, papa, you know that Guy is stern of manner, and not very much liked in general. And one so rich and beautiful as Miss Wylde can choose as she will."

"But Guy will be Lord of Pomeroy. To be his wife is what a daughter of the highest noble in the land might covet. And Guy will make a good husband—unless I am mistaken. At any rate, Joan, the matter lies entirely with himself and Miss Wylde: it is not seemly that you should thus comment upon it."

"I'm sure, papa, I wish Guy every happiness," replied Joan, her eyes filling at the reproach. "If he and Miss Wylde like one another, I could desire nothing better."

"Guy likes her; be very sure of that. And, if Mrs. Wylde is to be believed, the daughter likes him. And now you may leave me, my dear: I'm expecting Father Andrew."

As Joan went out of the room, she met the Father. He wore his priestly garments, by which Joan knew that he was going in for some office of religion. Father Andrew's face, a pleasant, rubicund face at all times, brightened at the sight of her. He was a stout man of middle height, and of some five-and-forty years.

"Welcome home, my child. We have been dull without you."

"Father," she whispered, after responding to his greeting, "do you think papa is seriously ill? He looks so changed."

"He is weaker than I like to see him. But the last fit of gout was a sharp one, and tried him terribly."

"But that was three months ago."

"True. Still, he has never seemed quite the same since. And he is not cautious enough as to what he takes. Poor living does not suit the taste of the Pomeroy. However, let us hope that he will get up his strength shortly."

Father Andrew passed into the lord's room, and Joan went about her business in the abbey. Visiting the housekeeper, Mrs. Rex, and other of the upper servants, and superintending the putting away of her own wardrobe—which she liked

to do, rather than leave it entirely to her maid. What with one thing and another, she was pretty busy until luncheon-time. Early in the afternoon, she called Bridget—who was the housekeeper's niece and a favourite servant.

"I want you to go as far as the lodge," she said. "Tell Sybilla—tell Miss Gaunt that I am at home; though I dare say she has heard it. Give my love to her and ask her to come up to see me."

Away went Bridget on her errand. She was soon back again; for the gamekeeper's lodge was only just beyond the village.

"Miss Gaunt's kind love and duty to you, Miss Joan; but she has one of her bad headaches this afternoon, and is not able to wait on you," was the message Bridget brought. And Joan Pomeroy's usually placid features took a momentarily cross expression—for she liked Sybilla Gaunt and was fond of her occasional companionship.

The family dined alone. Not in the great dining-hall below, but with all the usual state and ceremony appertaining to the Pomeroy's. The lord headed his table and Joan faced him; Guy and Rupert being on either side. To be alone at dinner was rather an unusual circumstance; for the abbey was fond of guests, though it might be only Father Andrew. But the lord was losing his energy, and of late seemed not to care how much he was left in quiet. With the removal of the cloth, Joan quitted the room. Rupert followed her, and strolled out. Guy remained with his father.

"Where have you been all the afternoon?" demanded the lord. "At the White House?"

"I called there," replied Guy.

"When do you mean to bring matters to a close? It seems to me that you are holding off unaccountably. Speak to her off-hand, Guy, and don't be afraid. I never knew that a Pomeroy could be scared by a woman."

Guy Pomeroy's livid face turned scarlet; a far deeper scarlet than that called up by Joan's bold question in the morning. If the proud old chief could only have known its cause!

"There is plenty of time," replied Guy, evasively.

"As you please, Guy. I thought your heart was set upon the match. I'm sure I don't wish to urge it, if you don't."

"Time enough," muttered Guy. "Father, drink claret; so much port is not good for you."

"I hate claret," said the lord; "not a drop should be on my table, but for fashion's sake. I never could get used to it as a young man, and I can't as an old one. In my day, Guy, the creed was to despise everything French."

"But think of the gout, sir. Jerome is fearing another attack."

"Jerome would fear his own shadow," replied the Lord of Pomeroy.

Meanwhile, Rupert strolled leisurely along, just as though he had no object in life except to look about him; but when he was beyond view of the abbey, he mended his pace, and went as if he were walking for a wager. It was a lovely summer's evening, and the setting sun threw its golden light athwart the heavy trees in the distance. Crossing some fields, by a sheltered path, he emerged from them at the back of the White House, and entered its garden by a small door.

Not to the open part of it: no, Rupert Pomeroy dared not do that, lest he should encounter the lynx eyes of Mrs. Wylde. He kept amidst the clump of shrubs that skirted the wall, and peeped out beyond them to see what was to be seen.

He saw a bright, radiant-looking girl, her dark brown hair shining in the sunbeams, and her cheeks damask with expectation. She was in an evening dress of white, and wore a small thin gold chain round her neck, and similar bracelets on her arms; and she was flitting from bed to bed, plucking a flower from one, stooping to inhale the scent of another, and—drawing farther from the windows of the house: drawing as if unconsciously, and without any apparent design. Just in the same manner, you observe, that Mr. Rupert Pomeroy had drawn away from the abbey.

Rupert Pomeroy, talking with his sister, had said the late Mr. Wylde had been something in India—a nabob, or rajah, or merchant—something at which people made fortunes.

In point of fact, Mr. Wylde had not been any one of the three; he had been a railway contractor. The greater portion of his fortune was made at home; though he did go out to India and died there. Of his large fortune, twenty-five thousand pounds were left to his daughter, to be paid to her on her marriage; and the rest (which was something like another twenty-five thousand doubled) would be hers on the death of his wife.

Mrs. Wylde and Alice came home from India—having accompanied Mr. Wylde thither—conscious of possessing more riches than they well knew how to count. The contractor had been a close man as to his means, and the wife had never supposed that he was worth a tithe of what those means turned out to be. Being so wealthy, it was of course incumbent on the widow to set up her tent accordingly; so she looked out for some pleasant locality where Roman Catholics congregated—for the Wylde's were of that persuasion—and was directed to Abbeyland. Mrs. Wylde took upon long lease the White House, which belonged to the Pomeroy's, and settled down in it.

They were very pleasant people, this widow and daughter; the latter was also lovely; and Guy and Rupert Pomeroy called upon and paid court to their new tenants. Rumours of the girl's great wealth got about, and the Lord of Pomeroy began to pay them attention himself. Guy's heart, hitherto invulnerable, fell before the charms of the young lady; the lord read the signs, and favoured the project. He was a proud old man, and the Wylde's were nobodies; but money was wanted at Pomeroy, and he put the riches against the want of descent. "One can't have everything nowadays," he remarked to Guy.

The lord, when speaking to Joan, had used the right term with regard to Mrs. Wylde—she was "cager" for the match. Mrs. Wylde's husband had not much to boast of in the way of descent: she had as little; was, in short, of no "descent," whatever. As a matter of course—at least, it is a matter of course with many such people—she was inordinately alive to the advantages of rank. Her own turn was over; she could not be other than she was; but to see Alice ✓

into a noble family was her first earthly ambition : and when the heir of Pomeroy permitted himself to show indication that he was paying court to Alice, her exultation knew no bounds. Once let Alice become his wife, and Mrs. Wylde would fold her hands in contentment and rest upon her laurels for life.

What though Guy Pomeroy was stern of mien and plain of face?—as Alice remonstrated. “Look at him from a little distance,” said Mrs. Wylde, “and where else would you find so handsome a form, so noble a man? It was only when you were close to him that you perceived his lip had a little defect in it, and his face was somewhat pale.”

“Yes,” answered Alice again, “but wives do not look at husbands from a distance; they pass their days close to them.”

However, she might have been tempted to take Guy, for she was just as great a worshipper of rank as her mother, and no doubt would have taken him, but for one unfortunate circumstance—she had fallen in love with his brother Rupert.

And Mrs. Wylde saw nothing of the mischief until it was done. We rarely suspect the treason that goes on under our very eyes. Rupert and Guy were alike equally welcomed to the White House : metaphorically, Mrs. Wylde worshipped any one bearing the name of Pomeroy. Rupert and Alice had plenty of time and opportunity given them to fall in love with one another.

But suddenly, without the slightest warning, Mrs. Wylde saw something one day, or thought she saw it, that she did not approve of—something like a private understanding between her daughter and Rupert : and a faint and very disagreeable suspicion dawned upon her that Alice might be getting to enjoy the society of the handsome Rupert more than that of Guy. Alice made a joke of her mother’s “fancy,” as she called it, denying it utterly ; and Mrs. Wylde was fain to be appeased. But the incident taught her caution : and from that hour Rupert Pomeroy’s visits to the house were discouraged. Call when he would, he could

not obtain admittance: the ladies were out, or the ladies were engaged.

Alice Wylde had not been well trained. Anything but that. Whether she was by nature self-willed and deceitful, or whether present circumstances were imparting those qualities to her, cannot be known. Vain to a fault was she; passionately fond of admiration; and, with it all, a perfect coquette.

Nearly from the very first she had detected the Heir of Pomeroy's serious feeling for her. It gratified her intensely. She drew him on; flirting, laughing, talking; playing off her pretty airs and graces upon him. It may be that she did not know what she was doing—what drawing him on to; it may be that she deemed his feelings might be shallow as her own—if, indeed, hers were shallow—and that if his wings did get a little singed in the radiant light of her presence, they would soon heal again. It may be, too, that she changed her tactics in a degree as the love grew between her and Rupert; and that if she did not actually repress Guy, she did not continue to give him encouragement.

The Lord of Pomeroy spoke a word of reproach to his son Guy at the dinner-table, for not pursuing more ardently his suit with Miss Wylde. Guy's face had flushed hot with emotion, and Guy had turned the subject off. He had cause to do both.

That very afternoon Guy Pomeroy had staked his die and lost it: he had offered himself to Alice Wylde, and been refused.

"You must accept me; you have led me to think that you would," pleaded Guy, in his terrible surprise. "I love you too passionately to lose you."

But Alice only said he was mistaken, and rejected him utterly. She gave him no hope whatever; on the contrary, she forbade him to think of hope, then or ever. And the Heir of Pomeroy left the house a mortified and (so far as his hopes went) a crushed man.

CHAPTER II.

AT THE WHITE HOUSE.

MRS. WYLDE chanced to be from home during the visit of Guy Pomeroy, just recorded, and knew nothing of what had transpired; neither was it disclosed to her, then or afterwards. Her carriage drove in late, close upon the dinner-hour; she hastened to dress, and then joined her daughter in the drawing-room.

"Does Mr. Pomeroy dine here?" inquired Mrs. Wylde, who was a little fair woman, with cold, light eyes and very light hair, and wore this evening a maize-coloured net dress with Indian ornaments.

"No, mamma."

"But I told you, Alice, to invite him if he called."

"I really forget whether I asked him or not," said Alice, indifferently. "I fancy I did not."

"You appear to be growing very forgetful of late," returned Mrs. Wylde. "Dinner, Cannot? That's right. I am fearfully hungry."

Mrs. Wylde liked her dinner: there was always a good one at the White House, whether on feast-days or fast-days, and her vexation at Alice's indifference and at the absence of Guy Pomeroy was soon forgotten. She began talking of the law-business which had called her to the distant county town.

"Miss Pomeroy has come home," observed Alice.

"Has she? When did she arrive?"

"Last night, I think he said."

"Who said?"

"Mr. Pomeroy."

"We will go over to-morrow and see her."

Dinner over, and dessert begun, Alice took a little fruit; and then, quitting the table without ceremony or apology, passed out at the glass-doors, which stood open to the warm air and setting sun. You have already seen her: for this

was mentioned before: in her white dress, with the gold circlets on her neck and arms, and the damask colour of expectation on her cheeks.

"Alice," called Mrs. Wylde, "I wish you would put a scarf over your shoulders, and take a parasol. You generally choose this hour for loitering in the garden, when the sun is full upon it."

"Mamma, I shall not take cold."

"I don't suppose you will. I was not thinking of cold: but you will spoil your neck. The hot sun of summer browns as much at setting as it does at mid-day."

Alice Wylde folded her lace pocket-handkerchief, and throw it over her neck.

"You have not taken your wine," pursued Mrs. Wylde.

"I don't want it, mamma. I took some at dinner."

Alice buried her face in a rose-tree as she spoke, inhaling its perfume. Mrs. Wylde took the glass of port wine which the butler had poured out for Alice, and drank it herself. Mrs. Wylde thought it wrong to waste good wine, and she was fond of port: the chief after-dinner wine of those days. She liked to take two or three glasses of it after dinner, and then to fall, when alone, into a comfortable doze. Thus, on these favourable opportunities, as Alice considered them, on these evenings when they were not on ceremony, Alice had an hour to herself to linger in the garden, to look at the rising moon, and listen to the nightingales.

Well for her—oh, more than well, had she seen and listened to nothing else! Strolling from flower to flower, she drew gradually away from the house, turned the grove of shrubs and trees, and was lost to sight. Mrs. Wylde had forgotten her then, and was deep in rose-coloured visions of that desirable time when she should ascend a few feet on the world's pinnacle as the mother of the Lady of Pomeroy.

Amidst the friendly, sheltering trees stood Rupert. Opening his arms he drew Alice to him. "My dearest!"

"Oh, Rupert, I thought this evening would never come! I have so wanted to see you, and—and—to tell you something. That is, if it would not be wrong to do it. I hardly know."

"Wrong to tell me anything!" he returned. "What can you know, Alice, that you may not share with me?"

"I will tell you; yes, I will: but you must never never let it transpire that you do know it. It would be cruel to him."

"To whom?"

"Guy. He came this afternoon to ask me to be his wife."

Rupert received the news with equanimity: perhaps the young lady had thought he would be moved by it. "Well?" said he, "what was your answer?"

"I told him I was sorry, but that I did not love him, and it was of no use his asking me to do so."

Rupert laughed. His arm was round her waist. "What did Guy say to that?"

"I hardly know what he said. My mind was in a whirl and I did not catch his words; only their meaning. He said he loved me as no other man had loved woman, for his passions were vehement within him, and it was I alone who had ever called them forth."

"You might have told him that *one* other, at any rate, loved you as passionately as he."

"He then spoke about being Guy Pomeroy of Pomeroy, and——"

Rupert threw back his head. "That's Guy all over. Of course he is that: but he need not enlarge upon it. How did it end?"

"He would not take my refusal. He did not seem to believe in it. He said young ladies rarely knew their own minds; that I had had no experience; and that he should never give me up whilst he had life. But I think, for all that, he did believe me, Rupert."

"Of course he did. You must keep him at a distance now."

"He said he should come to the White House as usual, and he hoped that I should in a few weeks grant him a different answer."

"And pray what did you say to that?"

"Nothing. Except that if he did continue to come

he must consider himself entirely mamma's visitor, not mine."

Rupert bent his face until his cheek touched hers while he whispered his sweet vows of love. She resisted not: for, passionately as Guy Pomeroy loved Alice, did she in her turn love Rupert. Whether Mr. Rupert's affection was very ardent is doubtful: he had paid such vows many a time before. Rupert Pomeroy was a general admirer of pretty women; and it often happens that those general admirers are not capable of that one pure, ardent passion which can stir man's heart but once. He loved Alice Wylde in his own fashion; quite sufficiently so to make her his wife. He hoped she would be his wife; though he did not see his way clear to making her so at present; for Mrs. Wylde would be dead against him, and so would be the Lord of Pomeroy. The lord favoured Guy's suit; he would resent his, Rupert's; the lord wanted Guy to be happy and rich. Guy, if he must marry, needed money with his wife: but Guy did not need money half as much as did Rupert.

Rupert drew her arm within his, and they paced the narrow sheltered walk. Alice took courage to ask Rupert what his future prospects were. Rupert replied vaguely. They did not appear to be at all tangible: but he was of a sanguine spirit, and talked glowingly, as one does talk who means to set the Thames on fire. Thus the time passed, all too swiftly for them. Wrapt in the magic of each other's presence, in the melody of love's golden chords, they saw not how swiftly the light was fading; and the sun had set, and the evening star shone in the heavens, when Alice awoke to reality.

"Oh, Rupert! see how late it is! What a long time we must have been walking here! What will mamma say?"

"Nothing. Your mamma is yet in her after-dinner nap."

"I don't know that. I have never stayed so late as this."

"You have had more to tell me than you ever had before."

"To tell you?"

"About Guy's presumption. Well, we must checkmate him; though it may take time to do it. Fare you well for to-night, my best and dearest."

Alice stole back to the house, not by the open lawn, but by a side path, her heart living over again the stolen interview, her cheeks crimson with the pressure of Rupert's lips.

"Tiresome old creature!—he's always doing it."

Now the words, fretfully spoken, did not apply to him who was filling her thoughts, Rupert Pomeroy, but to that worthy man, Cannet, the butler. Alice had made her way to a friendly side-door, and found it fastened. It chanced, however, that Cannet was close by at the moment she tried it; he unbolted it and threw it open.

"I never saw any one like you in my life, Cannet!—bolting and barring the doors at this hour, as if you feared we were going to be robbed! An evening or two ago, in the broad sunshine, I tried this door and found it locked."

"I'm very sorry, Miss Alice. But there's a lot of tramps about; there always is in hot weather, and it's right to be cautious."

"As if tramps would come now! They would let it grow dark first."

Cannet knew that twilight was just the hour favoured by tramps; but he did not say so. Alice went into the drawing-room; played softly for a minute or two, and then crossed the hall to the dining-room—startling her mother from her doze. The long drive had tired Mrs. Wylde.

"Why, mamma, what a sleep you are taking!"

"Am I! What's the time? Dear me, why, it is getting dusk. Why did you not wake me before, Alice? Where have you been?"

"I came here from the piano—wondering what had become of you."

Mrs. Wylde rang the bell, and then quitted the room with her daughter. Alice sat down again to the piano, and the tea came in.

And poor Mrs. Wylde, stirring and tasting her tea, had no more idea of the treason that had been enacted, than you, my good reader, have that you are going to be made a duke to-morrow. Ah, girls think themselves very clever, those who can act thus; but let them be assured, that a day of

reckoning must come. Alice Wylde saw no harm in deceiving her mother, or in the deceit itself—but that same day of reckoning might be laying up its vengeance even for her.

Mrs. Wylde, having attained a position in the great world, of course deemed it necessary to borrow its manners and customs. Time was, not so very long ago either, when she saw no necessity for keeping a maid for her personal service; but now she kept two maids, one for herself, and the other for her daughter. As Alice went into her room this night, the latter was waiting for her as usual. She was a respectable-looking, plainly-dressed woman of thirty; her hair, already slightly grey, was braided over her forehead; her face was thoughtful and sensible. In earlier days this girl had been the housemaid. She was good and faithful; and of their own religion. Mrs. Wylde took her to India, and afterwards she became Alice's attendant, of whom she was very fond.

"What's the matter, Theresa?" asked Alice: for the servant had her cheek bent upon her hands. "Is your tooth aching again? Why don't you go to the town and have it taken out?"

"And so I would," said Theresa, "if I were sure it was the tooth. I think it is—what's that fine new name?—neuralgia."

Alice laughed. "Neuralgia is as old as I am, Theresa."

"Well, miss, we have always said rheumatism. That was fine enough for us. Shall I begin your hair, Miss Alice?"

Alice was standing at the open window, gazing outwards. The moon was riding in the sky, the few stars that were out twinkled in their course: beneath, lay the grass-plot and the sweet flowers, and beyond rose the grove that had sheltered her and Rupert. Lost in memory, Alice stood on, oblivious of there being any such duties as undressing. Theresa waited, mentally debating whether she should speak of a certain matter that was troubling her, or whether she should not.

"Mamma's as tired as she can be," began Alice, her thoughts wandering to her mother. "It's a long drive;

and she says she felt quite weary with the deeds the lawyer had to read to her."

"It is a good long way to Owlstone, Miss Alice,—there and back."

"Mamma slept till tea-time, and then was angry with me for not awaking her. I was in the garden. What a stupid thing that Cannel is!—locking all the doors by daylight!"

Now it seemed to Theresa, who was reflective, conscientious, and a little given to be swayed by signs and symptoms—that her young mistress must have unconsciously opened this very subject on purpose to afford her an excuse for speaking: and she accepted it. Walking nearer to the window, she began in a low tone.

"I saw you there, Miss Alice."

"Saw me—where?" returned Alice, rather sharply.

"Out yonder, Miss Alice: down by the grave. Mr. Rupert Pomeroy was with you."

Alice was silent. This avowal was very awkward.

"How could you have seen me?" she presently asked, the question occurring to her. "Where were you, Theresa?"

"I went to the herb-bed: some of them downstairs said that a fomentation of hot sage-leaves to my cheek would ease the pain: and this," nodding at the broad gravel-path beneath, "is the nearest way, so I took the liberty of taking it. I saw you as I turned the corner, Miss Alice; you stood with your backs to me, both you and Mr. Rupert. He had his arm round your waist."

"Dear me, had he?"—after a dismayed pause. "He is very thoughtless. We were talking about something or other, I suppose. But now, Theresa, don't go telling this to mamma."

"Miss Alice," said the woman, gravely, "I came to your papa's house when you were but a little girl, and there were but two servants in all; and I have watched you grow up, and I have got fonder of you and prouder of you year by year. But, oh, my dear young lady—and for the reason I have just given, perhaps you'll let me say it—it is not right to be so familiar with Mr. Rupert when you are to marry Mr. Pomeroy."

"You stupid thing, Theresa! Who told you, pray, that I was to marry Mr. Pomeroy?"

"My mistress told me."

"Just like mamma!—fancying a thing must come to pass because she wishes it! Well, now, the truth is, Theresa—and I don't mind telling you, but you must take care not to repeat it again to mamma—that I am *not* going to marry Mr. Pomeroy."

"Then, Miss Alice, why not tell your mamma so?"

"I shall tell mamma in good time. But I'm sure you know there'll be no living in the house with her for a week afterwards. She has set her mind upon Mr. Pomeroy; and she will be ready to box my ears when she finds I won't have him."

"But, Miss Alice—you have encouraged Mr. Pomeroy," debated Theresa, feeling less sure and less easy upon the point that she chose to admit. "He comes often: he stayed with you in the drawing-room for nearly an hour to-day."

"I can't help his staying or his coming. Mamma was out, and I had to go to him. Don't be silly, Theresa. I tell you I am not going to marry the Heir of Pomeroy. And he knows that I am not."

"Trouble of this kind is more easy to get into than to get out of," resumed Theresa, in low, persuasive tones. "I confess I like Mr. Rupert better than I like Mr. Pomeroy; though it's not for me to presume to speak of my likes or dislikes. I would only just say this, my dear young lady: *do not deceive anybody*, especially your mother. If you don't like Mr. Pomeroy, and don't wish to have him, tell out the truth at once. 'Tis the safest way in the long run."

"There, you can do my hair now, Theresa. And don't worry your silly old head with what does not concern it. Things will come all right in what you call the long run, as you will find."

Leaving Alice to chatter to Theresa upon less embarrassing subjects, we will go after Rupert Pomeroy.

Passing through the side-gate to the lane on which it opened, went he, gay as a lark, humming the bars of some popular song. Rupert Pomeroy was of an essentially gay,

light, sanguine temperament: he had never been grave in his life for two minutes together. The branches of the trees on either side the lane met overhead; glancing up, he saw the moonbeams flickering through them—a pleasant sight; and he broke out into his song again:

“Oh, 'tis sweet when the moon is beaming
To roam through the shady grove:
Oh, 'tis sweet when the world is sleeping
To list to the nightingale's song.”

“Don't think that's quite right,” broke off Rupert, alluding to the words. “Think the nightingale goes with the moonbeams. Wish she could have stayed out longer—that ‘sweet love o' mine.’”

Before quite reaching the village, he turned aside to the left. Standing at some little distance from the road was an exceedingly pretty dwelling-house, not much larger indeed than a cottage: its rough stone walls were covered with ivy; jessamine and roses encircled its casements. You might have been puzzled to guess to what social class its inmates belonged; in all, excepting its size, it might have been the abode of a gentleman. Iron railings, covered with clematis, enclosed a small garden, its grass-plot and flower-beds not less well kept than were those of Mrs. Wylde. The gate was in the middle of the rails, a path leading straight from it to the cottage porch. It was the dwelling of Gaunt, the gamekeeper, and it was called the Lodge. John Gaunt—who was not an ordinary gamekeeper, and will have to be spoken of later—lived in it with his only child, a daughter. Leaning over the gate in the moonlight stood the daughter now. Rupert had seen her and turned aside.

“I thought it must be you, Sybilla,” spoke he, in his ready, free way. “What in the world have you got on?”

She laughed slightly, and drew off the shawl in which her head was enveloped. “I have a little cold,” she answered, “and my head has been aching all day.”

“By the way—yes. Joan mentioned at dinner that she had sent for you, and you were too ill to come,” observed Rupert, who remained on the outer side of the gate. “What was the matter?”

A hot flush and a slight contraction of the brow, not discernible in the moonlight, passed suddenly over her face, apparently called up by Rupert's words. Sybilla Gaunt was a magnificent girl, tall, dignified, upright, with a no less magnificent face: her features regularly beautiful, her hair of a purple black, and her large eyes of a deep, dark violet. But, with all her natural beauty, her face looked to-night strangely wan and haggard.

"My head pained me so much," she replied, slightly and evasively. "How is the lord, Mr. Rupert?"

"Oh, he is very well."

"My father thinks him much changed of late. He was at the abbey yesterday morning—the lord had sent to him about those preserves beyond the hill. He says he never saw any one change so rapidly for the worse as the lord is changing now."

"So Joan thinks—but she has not seen him for eight months, you know. I hope he will be all right again soon, Sybilla. Where is your father to-night?"

"He went up to Whittaker's. Do you want him?"

Without giving any direct answer, Rupert Pomeroy bent his head closer to Sybilla's over the gate, and began talking to her in very low tones—just as if he feared some eavesdropper might be hidden under the clematis. As we cannot hear what he said, the conversation must remain a secret. Sybilla gave an answering word, or a nod, now and again; the tears meanwhile gathering on her eyelashes, and she half stealthily wiping them away from time to time.

"Who's this?" suddenly cried Rupert, drawing away from the gate, his ear having caught the sound of footsteps close at hand. "Take courage, Sybilla."

They were the steps of Gaunt himself. A very tall and noble-looking man, dressed in a velvet coat and breeches and dark leggings. His features were just as handsome as his daughter's; the two faces in fact were much alike; the same noble cast of countenance, the same open, straightforward expression. As he came into view, Sybilla nodded to Rupert, and went in.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Rupert? Did you want me?" added Gaunt.

"No; I was only saying good-evening to Sybilla, seeing her standing here as I was going by. She says you think my father much changed."

"And so he is, Mr. Rupert; there's no doubt about it. Unless he gets to look better, I—I shall hardly know what to fear. Will you walk in?"

"Not to-night. I say, Gaunt, what about dragging that fish-pond?"

"The very thing I have just been up to Whittaker's about," replied Gaunt. "We had decided to do it to-morrow, but your brother sent me word this evening that it must be put off until the next day."

"What for, I wonder?"

"He is going out, I believe, to-morrow."

"What of that?"

"Well, he says he wishes to be present when it's done."

"Oh, does he? It will come, next, that no one must stir hand or foot on the property without his leave. You'll see that, Gaunt."

Gaunt slightly smiled. "He is the heir, you know, Mr. Rupert."

"We all know that: he takes care we don't forget it. So be it: I do not see that it matters much to us. It has pleased my father to exalt Guy ever since his babyhood, and of course he has grown domineering. Good-night to you, Gaunt."

John Gaunt stood a moment after Rupert left, thinking of his last words. He did not himself much like Guy Pomeroy, and wondered how he should get on with him when he came into power, and whether he should feel inclined then to act as keeper. He and the lord had ever been on the best of terms; almost friends.

"Better not anticipate," thought Gaunt, as he turned indoors.

Sybilla sat at the frugal supper-table, the shawl well drawn about her shoulders. John Gaunt sat down and helped himself. Sybilla took a little upon her plate, and

pretended to eat: but it was evident that she had little inclination for it.

"No appetite again, Sybilla?"

Her face flushed. "The heat makes me feel languid, father. And my head has ached to-day."

Nanny, the old serving-woman, came in to remove the tray when they had finished. Gaunt rose and took down one of his small stock of books. It was a volume of Virgil—for he was a man of education.

"I will say good-night, dear father," said Sybilla, advancing to him. "My head will get better in bed."

"Good-night, my dear one," he said, fondly kissing her. "May the holy saints have you in their keeping!"

The first thing Sybilla did upon entering her chamber—a small, pretty room, whose casement looked towards the White House—was to let the cumbersome shawl slip from her shoulders, to fall upon her knees before the crucifix that hung opposite her bed, and burst into tears. Tears? Nay; that is scarcely the proper word. Sobs, rather. Passionate, grievous sobs; suppressed only lest they should be heard below.

"It is getting more than I can bear," she wailed in piteous tones. "Who will break it to him—who will break it to him? My dear, loving, trusting father—who has ever deemed that I and deceit were as far divided as——"

A very paroxysm of grief interrupted the words. After a few moments' yielding to it, Sybilla grew calmer. Folding her hands together, she raised her eyes imploringly to the crucifix, as if seeking for that comfort above, which, as it seemed, she could not find here.

Meanwhile, Rupert Pomeroy, after calling in at Whitaker's—who was the keeper under Gaunt—and on sundry other people, for he made himself at home in the village with high and low, at length reached home. It was late. Jerome met him.

"All in bed?" asked Rupert.

"All but Mr. Guy, sir. He has not gone to his room yet."

"Where is he?"

"In the oak-room, walking about. I'm afraid something has vexed him."

"Why do you fear that?"

"Just listen to his footsteps, Mr. Rupert. To walk like that is not usual with Mr. Guy."

Rupert paused. Guy's heavy tread sounded from the oak-room, unceasing and monotonous.

"He must be doing penance," remarked Rupert, with a light laugh.

"He has been pacing there these two hours, sir, ever since the lord retired. Just that same sharp, measured tread that you hear now."

"Well, good-night to you, Jerome," returned Rupert, as he went on to his chamber. And he smiled again to himself as he entered it.

"You can't have quite everything your own way, Guy my brother, although you are the son-and-heir," spoke Rupert, mentally. "Alice Wylde is not for you—and you will do well to make the best and worst of her refusal, and think no more about it."

CHAPTER III.

THE KEEPER'S DAUGHTER. .

THE state entrance of the abbey lies on the left as you pass under the great gateway. This admits you to a quaint, but, in its way, magnificent hall, from which a fine old staircase winds upwards. A similar entrance-door lies on the right of the porte-cochère—if we may borrow a term from the French—leading into a similar hall and to a similar staircase; but at present this other entrance is kept locked, not being in use. The Lords of Pomeroy generally use the one first mentioned; and just now there is no second household at the abbey.

Ascending this first-mentioned staircase, which is lined

with pictures, you reach a wide corridor, which has a few pictures also hung in it, between the many doors admitting to the front and back chambers. At the end of the corridor is the south tower: for these rooms are on the right of the entrance-gates, looking eastward. It has been already said that the abbey faces the east. As a rule, the rooms are not large, but dark, ancient, and handsome. The present lord, who keeps up a great deal of unnecessary state, and whose retainers are numerous, occupies the whole of the front pile, together with a portion of the north wing; but the rooms on the other side the entrance-gates have been little used since the death of the Lady of Pomeroy some years ago, and especially since the lord fell into poor health.

The bedrooms all face the quadrangle; most of the sitting-rooms face the sea and the open country: and in one of those sitting-rooms, on the morning following the day already mentioned, sits Miss Joan. It is the room next the south tower, is called the "purple room" from the colour of its furniture and hangings, and is the particular sitting-room of Joan. Joan has attended early mass in the chapel, has written some letters, has gone her usual rounds connected with the household, and is now preparing to sit down and sew. Joan Pomeroy is great at embroidery, and she is beginning to "work," as she calls it, a delicate cambric frock for one of Mrs. Capel's children: or, strictly speaking, for one expected. She feels less anxious about her father's health than she felt yesterday, for the lord rose to breakfast this morning and looked better.

"Can it be twelve o'clock already!" exclaimed Joan, as the great clock of the quadrangle began to ring out mid-day, and various other clocks in the abbey followed suit. "How I must have wasted my time this morning! It was those letters I wrote."

Bending her head, she regarded her work attentively. A very little of it was as yet done.

"If I had not begun it, I would choose the other pattern," she soliloquized. "It was less elaborate, and would not have taken half the time to work. Suppose I should not get this done in time—I who have always given the babies their

baptismal robe? Perhaps Sybilla can help me. I will send and ask her to spend the day——”

“Mrs. and Miss Wylde,” interrupted one of the footmen, as he threw open the door.

Joan rose, full of dignity. Truth to say, she had not very much liked either Mrs. or Miss Wylde when she made their acquaintance before leaving home. Joan had a prejudice in favour of birth—and these ladies possessed none of it. It was not the want of that, however, but something in themselves she remembered to have disliked. On the other hand, and Joan was candid enough to admit this, she had seen too little of them to judge fairly. And, if the future lord was to marry the young lady, Joan knew that she ought to dismiss all prejudice from her mind.

“Will Miss Pomeroy pardon this early visit?” began Mrs. Wylde, as she held out her hand. “Between near neighbours—and in a remote country district—mid-day visits are, I believe, permitted. I had, moreover, a special object in coming thus early.”

“I am very glad to see you; it is not at all too early,” answered Joan, cordially, as she gave them her hand.

“What a lovely pattern!” exclaimed Mrs. Wylde, her eyes falling on the embroidery as she sat down.

“I am pleased to hear you say so. But I was rather regretting that I had begun it: it is intricate, and will take long.”

“But it will be very beautiful when done. It is for an infant’s robe?”

“For the little one that my sister, Mrs. Capel, is expecting.”

“What a long time you stayed away, Miss Pomeroy!”

“My visits are generally pretty long when I go to her. The children do not like to part with me. But I should have returned before this had I thought papa was so ill.”

“Is the lord ill?” cried Mrs. Wylde, quickly.

“He does not acknowledge it, but I am sure he must be. His looks betray it. And it seems to me that he has no spirit or energy left.”

“I have observed that myself,” said Mrs. Wylde.

“He has not looked well since the last attack of gout,”

remarked Alice, almost the first words she had spoken. "The Lord of Pomeroy has always been very kind to me, and I hope he will soon grow strong again."

She spoke with earnestness. Joan smiled, pleased at the expression of feeling. With her dimpled cheeks, her radiant brown eyes, her bright and pure complexion, Alice was indeed beautiful, and Joan did not wonder at Guy's infatuation.

"But I have not explained the object of my coming at *this unseemly hour*," resumed Mrs. Wylde. "I want to take you back with me to the White House for the day, Miss Pomeroy."

"Oh, thank you; but I—could not go," said Joan, quickly.

"But why?"

"For one thing, papa is so poorly—at least, in appearance—that I do not like to leave him."

"Oh, I hope you will not disappoint us, dear Miss Pomeroy! Look at Alice: how eagerly she is awaiting your consent!"

The pretty blushing face was indeed full of hope as it turned to Joan. It was so pretty that Joan could hardly keep her eyes from it; and she began to think that Alice would be a very nice wife for Guy, and to wish to know more of her.

"I will see what papa thinks," she said. "But I had intended to send for Sybilla Gaunt to spend the day here with me."

"Sybilla Gaunt!" Mrs. Wylde was beginning, remonstrance in her eye and on her lip—but Joan had already disappeared.

The lord was in his own sitting-room; the room next the gateway. His desk stood open on the table before him, and he looked up from his writing as Joan entered.

"Any message for either of the lads—George or Leolin?" asked he, before Joan could speak.

"Are you writing to them, papa?"

"To both: giving them a lecture a-piece," he added, with a half-smile.

"Do they need it, papa?"

"Oh, boys out in the world always need it. It never comes amiss, Joan, be very sure. I am to give your love, I suppose?"

"My very dear love to both. Papa, Mrs. Wyldé and her daughter are here. They wish me to go back with them for the day."

"Then go. Go by all means, Joan."

"But I do not like to leave you."

"Not like to leave me? What nonsense! Why, yesterday was the first day you were here for I can't tell how many months: what did I do, do you suppose, without you all that time? Of course you can go. I should like you to go. Guy would like it, I am sure. And you don't dine with us, you know, this evening."

Joan returned to the purple room to say she would go. The lord followed her, and stayed with the visitors whilst Joan made herself ready. As they were departing, Mrs. Wyldé expressed a hope that the lord and Mr. Pomeroy would honour her table by joining it at dinner.

"I don't feel quite up to dining from home," replied the lord, shaking his head. "In a day or two, perhaps, I shall be better, and will dine with you then. As to Guy, he goes over to the town to-day, and must be back in time for our own table, for we are expecting a few gentlemen to join it."

The county town, Owlstone, some nine miles distant, was always referred to by Abbeyland as "the town." Mrs. Wyldé, full of regret that neither the lord nor Mr. Pomeroy would honour her that evening, took her departure.

"What a lovely day!" cried Joan, as they stepped out from the large gates.

They began their walk through the village. Joan wore a rich black silk, and (it must be confessed) a very ugly drab bonnet; she was addicted to a sober style of dress and to grave colours. Alice wore white, blue ribbons round her dainty straw hat.

In going along they saw Guy and Rupert in the distance, talking with Gaunt. Guy, perhaps not seeing the ladies, started across the path that led round to the stables; walking

quickly, as if he were in a hurry. Rupert came towards them. Gaunt came on also with a slower step.

"What a noble-looking man he is!" exclaimed Mrs. Wylde involuntarily, alluding to Gaunt. "He would do honour to an earl's coronet."

Joan smiled. "It is said they trace a nobler descent than that—from John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. In those days, possibly, whilst a Gaunt was a knight, the Pomeroy was only his esquire. Our family fell for a time from its high estate."

"How is it that the Gaunts have so fallen?" asked Mrs. Wylde.

"We don't really know that they have fallen; it may be they were never anything but simple gentlepeople," lightly remarked Miss Pomeroy. "None can deny, though, that they ought to be something greater and grander if looks could ensure it."

It was true that Gaunt believed himself to be descended from John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, noted in the days of the second Richard: true that he certainly traced his pedigree to very remote times. He was a gentleman by recent descent—but was very poor, his income being little more than a hundred pounds yearly. He was called in the neighbourhood the "gentleman keeper," for although he was to all intents and purposes head-gamekeeper to the Lord of Pomeroy, and conscientiously performed its duties, he accepted no remuneration for it. Excepting the cottage, which he had rent free. And though admitted to very little more equality with the Pomeroyes than he would have been were he a regular gamekeeper, he and the lord were very friendly with one another. The Lord of Pomeroy respected Gaunt and liked him; both for himself, and also for his alleged antecedents: when alone, Gaunt had occasionally been bidden to lunch with him. But the sons, Guy and Rupert, whilst showing themselves sufficiently friendly with Gaunt, were given at times to treat him a little *de haut en bas*, forgetting perhaps that he was not an ordinary keeper, Rupert especially.

Gaunt's wife had also been a gentlewoman, though poorer

even than himself. She died early, leaving to their only child, Sybilla, the few hundred pounds that she possessed in her own right. Sybilla had been educated at the convent, was an inmate of it for nearly ten years. She shared in all its educational advantages, though of course the same terms could not be paid with her that were paid with most of the pupils—such, for example, as with the daughters of the Lord of Pomeroy. Joan patronized Sybilla, who was now three-and-twenty, and really felt a great friendship for her.

Rupert, leaving Gaunt to follow at his leisure, came up with a quick step and glowing face, shaking hands with Mrs. and Miss Wylde in his gay way. Joan walked forward to meet Gaunt. Mrs. Wylde stayed to protect her daughter from the attractive wiles of Rupert, who was already chattering nonsense to her.

The gamekeeper took off his hat to Joan as an equal might have done, not touching it as a gamekeeper. In his heart he probably considered himself quite equal to the Pomeroy: superior in descent, if inferior in position. His manners were good; by nature he was proud, though he rarely let it appear. Just as the Lord of Pomeroy lorded it over his servants, so did Gaunt lord it over the two keepers under him, so far as exacting strict obedience went. But he was kind and considerate to them; a good and a Christian man.

"How is Sybilla?" asked Joan, when her greeting was over.

"She is not well, Miss Pomeroy."

"I am sorry. I heard she had a bad headache—but that was yesterday."

"I cannot make her out," observed Gaunt. "She seems to have lost her health and spirits for some weeks past. Her face is quite drawn and thin."

"But what is the matter with her?" questioned Joan.

"It is more than I can tell," replied the keeper, shaking his head. "She thinks it is the heat that affects her, but we have had many a summer as hot as this; and even whilst she says it, she is cold, and has to wrap herself up. Her mother went off in a waste," he added, in a despairing kind

of tone, "and I remember she was always cold, after it set in. If I lost Sybilla——"

Gaunt stopped, overcome. All the sympathy in Joan's nature—and she had a large share of it—was aroused.

"What does Mr. Norris say? Of course you have had him to her."

"No, I have not, Miss Pomeroy. Not yet; Sybilla so strongly objects to it. She says she is quite sure she shall get better more quickly if let alone."

"I will call and see her," said Joan. "I may spare a few minutes now, as we go by."

"I wish you would, Miss Joan. And perhaps you will give me your opinion of her afterwards. If you think advice is necessary, I will at once call in Mr. Norris—whether Sybilla consents or not."

"I will. By the way—talking of illness," added Joan—"what do you think of my father? He seems to me to be so much altered. Do you judge him to be ill?"

"I am sure he is altered, Miss Pomeroy, but whether he is seriously ill is another question. People do alter very much as they grow in years."

"I know. But papa seems to have altered suddenly."

"No; not suddenly. At least not very suddenly. The lord has never been the same since his illness in the spring. I alluded to it a week or two ago; I mean, to the change in him; but he passed the subject off with a curt remark. He never likes to be questioned, you know, Miss Joan."

Joan nodded a dismissal, seeing that Mrs. and Miss Wylde were coming on, the former having at length succeeded in getting her daughter away from the light chatter of Rupert. Gaunt bowed, turned away, and put on his hat, which he had kept off during his conversation with Joan. He raised it again in passing the other ladies; who vouchsafed him the merest nod in answer. Mrs. Wylde had never been able to understand why Gaunt should be regarded as above any ordinary gamekeeper.

They went on through the village, these three ladies, Miss Pomeroy momentarily stopping now and then to greet

the cottagers who came out when they saw her. She was a great favourite with all.

At the extremity of this straggling village, they came in view of the gamekeeper's lodge. Very picturesque it looked to-day, the sunshine flickering upon it through the waving trees, the brilliant flowers clustering on the grass-plot.

"How hot it is!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Wylde.

"Do you feel it so?" returned Joan. "I was going to ask you to sit down for an instant on the bench whilst I go in to see Sybilla Gaunt. It is beautifully shady under those trees; and it will rest you."

She pointed to the bench in Gaunt's garden. It stood in the shade on the green grass, and looked inviting enough. Mrs. Wylde, however, started back as if she had been electrified.

"To see Sybilla Gaunt! My dear Miss Pomeroy!"

"I will not keep you two minutes," said Joan. "I am anxious about her. Her father says she is ill."

"Miss Pomeroy," repeated Mrs. Wylde, in tones of strong remonstrance, "you must not go in *there*; to see *her*. You have no mother, my dear, therefore you must excuse my interposing, so far, in the light of one."

Joan Pomeroy, haughty and self-opinionated by nature and by training, just as all the Pomeroy's were, drew herself up. She had taken Mrs. Wylde's objection in a wrong light. "You do not yet know Sybilla Gaunt, I see, or you would scarcely speak disparagingly of her. She has been exceedingly well brought up; her education has been altogether that of a gentlewoman."

"So I have heard. But no good ever comes of educating girls in her sphere of life; and so it has proved here. My dear Miss Pomeroy, since you went away, the girl has turned out to be—to be—in short, not respectable."

The two ladies stood looking at one another, Joan asking the explanation with her eyes that her lips disdained to utter. Alice traced characters on the dusty road with the end of her parasol, and listened, rather amused at the dispute.

"What did you say?" demanded Joan, whose fiery Pomeroy blood was rising.

"My dear, there is no need to put yourself out," said Mrs. Wylde. "It is an everyday affair with village beauties; always has been, and always will be. Sybilla Gaunt is beautiful; but she is no longer respectable, and you must cease all communication with her."

Joan Pomeroy's eyes flashed: she could be almost as passionate as her eldest brother, when greatly provoked. "It is false, whoever says it," she declared. "How dare my father and my brothers suffer tales to go about to the prejudice of Sybilla Gaunt? They are the lords of the soil, and they ought to have put a stop to them."

Mrs. Wylde gave a short, friendly laugh. "My dear, you will have to abandon your favourable prejudices," she quietly said. "Sybilla Gaunt is not respectable."

"Am I respectable?" returned the angry Joan. "You may as well say that I am not so. Sybilla is my friend; she is as much a gentlewoman by descent as I am. I pray you wait for me: I shall go in to see her."

Allowing no further opposition, Miss Pomeroy walked to the lodge-door, and entered without knocking. She was in no frame of mind to wait upon the polite decorums of life: indeed, they obtained little favour from her at the best of times. The small, but pretty sitting-room seemed in a litter, and Sybilla sat in it, her head bent on the table. A shawl lay on the ground, and appeared to have slipped from her shoulders.

How like she was to her father this day! Tall and stately; with the same noble features, the same unconscious, lofty air and manner. Certainly she looked a fit descendant for the proud Duke of Lancaster.

With a faint exclamation of dismay, Sybilla sprang up when she saw an intruder, and that it was Miss Pomeroy. Her pale features—not naturally so, but pale, as it appeared, from illness—grew flushed, and she picked up the shawl to throw it on again. In her haste and confusion, she defeated her own object, and the shawl somehow alighted on her head. Joan Pomeroy gazed at her with a keen gaze; and Joan Pomeroy fell back against the inner door, and her spirit turned faint within her.

Joan did not speak; she only looked at her. Sybilla's trembling hands busied themselves in adjusting the shawl, and the transient crimson of her face faded to a death-like whiteness.

"What is this?" asked Joan at length.

"What is—what?" returned Sybilla, a terrible trouble shining in the depths of her dark violet eyes.

"I met your father, and he told me you were ill," harshly repeated Joan. "*What* is this illness, I ask?"

"Don't frighten me, Miss Pomeroy," gasped Sybilla, who looked ready to faint.

"Answer me, I say," repeated Joan, her face as stern, at that moment, as her brother Guy's.

Sybilla's breathing was so laboured that for a moment she could not answer: when she did speak, it was in a faint, nervous tone, and in short, broken sentences. "The heat this summer—has been great—it has made me ill—it has overpowered me."

Joan Pomeroy heard her to an end, bending her stern, searching eyes upon her. "It is the heat that overpowers you? The heat, you say? Then why do you wear a shawl to increase it?" And Sybilla Gaunt only laid her hand upon her heart, as if to still its beating, and made no reply, for she had none to make. Miss Pomeroy stepped close up to her.

"Do you think you can deceive me? No: though you have succeeded, it would appear, in deceiving your father. You have been mad, Sybilla Gaunt; mad. You have degraded yourself——"

"Do not say too much, Miss Pomeroy," interrupted Sybilla, in a low tone. "You don't know all."

"I know and see sufficient. I know that the truth is whispered outside, and that I was warned not to subject myself to contact with you. Shame upon you! You who were the stay of your father! you who have boasted a descent from the Plantagenets! you who were reared a gentlewoman! Sybilla Gaunt, I would as soon have believed ill of myself as of you."

Miss Pomeroy gathered up her petticoats, as if to guard them against contamination with the door-sill, and swept

out. It was her one great failing—hot, hasty passion: in that she and Guy were alike: but she had rarely been so excited as now.

Mrs. Wylde was resting on the bench, and Alice stood outside in the road. Mrs. Wylde rose when she saw Miss Pomeroy, and hastened into the road also, as if the very grass-plot at Gaunt's burnt her feet.

"Come, Alice, what are you looking at? Oh, I see; Mr. Guy Pomeroy is there."

Joan turned her head. Guy was on horseback, branching off towards Owlstone. Gaunt was now coming in the direction of his cottage.

"Let us get on," muttered Joan. "I do not want to see him."

"Well, my dear Miss Pomeroy, are you satisfied?" asked Mrs. Wylde.

"Quite," returned Joan, her voice harsh in her bitter distress.

"Of course; there is no possibility of mistaking it. And her father is a—in fact, an idiot."

"Who is it that has—has brought the trouble to the house?" interrupted Joan, in the same abrupt tone, telling so surely of affliction.

"There I cannot enlighten you," replied Mrs. Wylde. "She has always, I hear, held herself aloof from the village rustics."

"*Held herself aloof from the village rustics!*" echoed Joan Pomeroy, with angry emphasis—angry, even then, that Sybilla's position could be so mistaken. "I tell you, Sybilla is a gentlewoman, with—hitherto—all a gentlewoman's instincts."

Mrs. Wylde coughed. Alice broke into a sudden exclamation, perhaps to drown its mocking sound.

"How very beautiful she is!"

"Who, child?"

"Sybilla Gaunt, mamma."

"Oh," said Mrs. Wylde, scornfully. "A homely saying my old mother sometimes used is a very true one. 'Handsome is that handsome does.' Sybilla Gaunt had better have been born ugly enough to frighten the crows,"

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEATH FLAG.

DEEPER and deeper grew the twilight of the summer night. The glow of the sunset had faded in the north-west, giving place to the colour that has been likened to opal, but still no summons arrived for Miss Pomeroy; either in the shape of carriage or servants.

At the open window of the large drawing-room of the White House, Joan sat, wondering much that no one came for her, and anxious to be gone. She had come forth to the day's visit as a matter of duty rather than of pleasure, and it had not proved agreeable to her. The instinctive dislike to Mrs. Wylde and her daughter had made itself rather obtrusively felt; for, shocked and angry though Joan herself was at the matter connected with the keeper's daughter, she did not like or approve of the contemptuous tone assumed by Mrs. Wylde. Condemnation may be given without scorn. Altogether her day's pleasure had been utterly spoilt, though Joan suffered not that fact to appear. Silent and preoccupied her entertainers had thought her, and extremely absurd in regard to that Sybilla Gaunt.

"Ten o'clock!" exclaimed Joan, starting up as the hour struck out from the gilt clock on the mantelpiece. "*Indeed* I must go. You will allow one of your servants to see me home, Mrs. Wylde."

"Only ten, my dear; *only* ten o'clock. It is very early yet."

"I cannot *imagine* why I have not been sent for."

"But I can, my dear Miss Pomeroy. The lord has a gentleman's dinner-party this evening, as you know: rely upon it, your brother Guy intends to come for you himself: he only waits to dismiss his guests, and be at liberty."

So spoke, so thought Mrs. Wylde. She knew nothing of the dismissal given to Guy Pomeroy by her daughter the day before. Alice sat silent and spiritless: she could not this evening steal out to meet Rupert.

So Joan, at the entreaty of Mrs. Wylde, consented to stay a little longer. In truth, she thought the reason assigned by that lady was probably the correct one, and that Guy would arrive shortly.

Not a breath of air could be felt, though the windows were thrown up to their utmost height; not as much as a flutter disturbed the wax lights. It was a very handsome drawing-room, all gilding and mirrors, and beautiful modern objects; quite a contrast to the staid, sombre rooms of Pomeroiy.

"All nouveaux riches, like themselves," thought Joan, with little flattery.

A loud peal was heard at the hall-door. It proved to be old Jerome. He brought bad news. The ladies, in their anxiety, had him in the drawing-room to listen to it.

The Lord of Pomeroiy had been taken ill at the dinner-table. But he had sat out the repast bravely; allowing nothing of his indisposition to be seen. At nine o'clock he made an apology for retiring, putting it upon the score of fatigue, leaving his eldest son to supply his place. Since then he had become rapidly worse.

"Why did not Mr. Rupert come for me?" demanded Miss Pomeroiy of old Jerome. "He might know that I should naturally wish to be with papa."

"Mr. Rupert does not yet know the lord is ill, Miss Joan," was the man's answer. "He went out with the gentlemen when they left. Mr. Pomeroiy was going out also, but I whispered him to stay behind—and then I told him. He is with the lord now."

"Any way, Jerome, I ought to have been sent for at once."

"Miss Joan, I believe you were forgotten; it's as true as that I am here," added Jerome in his earnestness. "One was running for Mr. Norris, one for Father Andrew, and the house was all in confusion. Mrs. Rex suddenly thought of you, and asked if any one had been sent to attend Miss Pomeroiy home. So I came myself."

"Yes, yes, quite right," murmured Joan. And she departed with Jerome.

In passing the short and shady turning that led to the gamekeeper's lodge, Miss Pomeroy's eyes naturally turned in that direction. Just at the same moment some one came up the same turning with a fleet step: from the height and figure Joan knew it to be one of her brothers, either Guy or Rupert. It proved to be the latter.

"Why, Joan!—out on foot with the night-birds!" cried he, in his ever-gay tones.

"Yes, out with the owls and the bats," she answered. "Very polite of you, I must say, to leave me at the White House until now! You might have come for me, Rupert."

"So I might. So I would, had I known. I should have thought you were at home ages ago."

"Were you coming from Gaunt's, Rupert?"

"Not I. I had been round to Bardel's."

Bardel was the junior keeper under Whittaker. Joan, who had taken her brother's offered arm, paused in reflection. She much wanted to speak to Rupert of what was troubling her; yet hardly liked to do so. But Joan Pomeroy, straightforward to the last degree, never beat long about the bush; if she wished to say a thing, she generally said it.

"Rupert," she began, choosing her words rather lamely, "have you heard of—of—do you know of this dreadful—dreadful misfortune, which has overtaken Sybilla Gaunt?"

"Dreadful misfortune?" repeated Rupert.

"Or—perhaps I should rather say—that she has brought upon herself?"

"Why, what has she gone and done?" cried Rupert, lightly. "Eaten chicken on fast-day?"

"Rupert! Do you often see Sybilla?" continued Joan. "Have you seen her lately?"

"I saw her to-day."

"Well, then, does—does anything—*peculiar*—strike you in her appearance?"

"Not that I remember."

"Then, Rupert, you must be very unobservant—and—and I think you are only laughing at me."

"I am sure I don't know what you are driving at, Joan."

What is there in Sybilla's appearance to strike me? She talks of the heat."

Joan considered. Young men were naturally unob-servant: perhaps Rupert was so.

"I—I am afraid Sybilla has—forgotten herself, Rupert," she resumed in low, sad tones. "It will kill her father—and I should think kill herself too."

"Forgotten herself! What on earth do you mean?"

"Well—she—she looks very sickly, and there must be a cause for it."

"Poor girl, perhaps there is! She may have gone and swallowed the copper tea-kettle."

"I knew you would only turn what I said into ridicule; you always do," cried Joan, vexed and humbled. "All I wished to ask you, Rupert, was, if you know whether any stranger has been intimate at Gaunt's of late."

"Let's see," said Rupert, making a show of putting on his considering cap. "I run in at will; the son-and-heir more charily. Father Andrew goes in; and I am not sure but that the lord goes."

"I said any *stranger*," repeated Joan emphatically.

"I have not seen one. Joan, my dear, let me give you a piece of advice—don't knock your head against a stone wall. As to Sybilla, I do not consider that it is any business of yours or mine to pry and peer into her affairs. Gaunt is quite capable of seeing to his own daughter."

Joan, feeling very much dissatisfied with Rupert's manner, she hardly knew why, dropped the subject, and told him of their father's illness. Not that Joan felt particularly anxious herself; for the lord was subject to these sudden attacks of sickness.

"I thought he was uneasy at the dinner-table," remarked Rupert. "Jerome," he called, turning to wait for the slower steps of the old servant, "is it gout again?"

"Yes, Mr. Rupert: And a bad attack I know it will be."

"So you always say, Jerome."

"Well, sir, we shall see. I fear it will."

"It may do good instead of harm," observed Rupert to his sister, whilst Jerome fell behind again. "I sincerely hope

it will. The gout has been hanging about him ever since the spring. A good sharp attack now may carry it away."

"Alice Wylde will marry Guy," whispered Joan to her brother, as they were approaching the abbey gates.

Rupert whistled to a little dog that ran out of the quadrangle, not immediately replying. "You think so, do you, Joan?"

"And you evidently do not, by your tone," she rejoined.

"Nay, I don't pretend to understand the business of the world in general, as you do. Am not clever enough for it."

"Don't be silly, Rupert. I judge only by probabilities; what I see and hear. Mrs. Wylde was hinting at different items in her own affairs to-day; though why she should have done so before me, I cannot tell, and it rather struck me she was *talking at* Alice. Did you know that if Alice marries without her mother's consent, she forfeits her twenty-five thousand pounds?"

"Yes, if she marries before she is four-and-twenty years of age. After that, no restriction is laid upon her."

"Well, I did not know it until to-day. She does forfeit it however, and Mrs. Wylde, should Alice be disobedient, can will the money away to whom she pleases. Mrs. Wylde is bent upon her marrying Guy: you can't mistake that: and no girl in her senses would forfeit so large a fortune. Therefore I judge that Alice will accept Guy."

"She may not like Guy. She may prefer to wait."

"I think not. And why should she not marry Guy? What an exalted position it would be for her!"

"Next door to being up in the moon."

"Joke as you may, Rupert, I believe you will find I am right. That Alice is looking forward to it she let slip to-day. We had been talking about the abbey—it seems to be Mrs. Wylde's favourite theme—of its vastness, its gloom, and its need of restoration. 'I shall have it so renovated that you won't know it for the same place,' Alice suddenly cried, waking up out of a reverie; 'I shall make it the admiration of the whole county.' And when she saw us looking at her, she recollected herself, blushed, and laughed. 'I mean,' she said, by way of correction or excuse, 'that I

should do it were I the Lord of Pomeroy.' Rely upon it, Rupert, she means to be Lady of Pomeroy."

Rupert had resumed his whistling—to himself this time and very softly, smiling much. Joan inquired why he laughed.

"To think of the changes that must take place ere she could be Lady of Pomeroy. The deaths, for instance."

"Only papa's, Rupert. Guy will be the lord then."

"True. Yes."

Lights gleamed from several of the front casements; people seemed to be passing from room to room. Jerome, full of apprehension, felt sure the lord was worse—and said so. Rupert rebuked him.

"You are ever ready to anticipate evil, Jerome."

"Well, sir, I *fear* this illness; and that's the truth. And," he added to Rupert in his agitation, "if ever I saw coming death upon a face, I saw it this night upon my poor master's."

A few days went on, full of grief and uncertainty as to the Lord of Pomeroy. It was feared that the gout would attack a vital part; Mr. Norris, the local surgeon, was frequently at the abbey, Dr. Rayner and Dr. Bill came once a day from Owlstone.

One morning Joan, about to pass out of the purple room, encountered Father Andrew, who had just then quitted the sick-chamber. The lord was better, and the improvement had put every one in spirits. Joan asked him to enter, and they sat down. The renewed hope gave her leisure to revert to other troubles: for the few past days the lord's state had absorbed all anxieties.

"Father," she said, in low tones, "do you—do you know that—that anything is wrong with Sybilla Gaunt?"

The priest rose. A wasp had made its way in at the open casement, and he took out his red silk handkerchief to flirt it out again.

"Nasty things, those wasps!" he cried. "One of them gave me a rare sting in the neck last year. I had to sit for half a day with a wet blue-bag applied to the place."

"But—did you hear what I asked you, father? About Sybilla?"

"Eh, child? What about her?"

Joan repeated the words, putting them somewhat differently. The wasp had been driven out, but Father Andrew remained at the casement, as if to guard it.

"She seems rather poorly," he remarked, speaking with his back to Joan. "Should she not grow better shortly, I should recommend her to try change of air."

Joan paused. "But surely, father, you—you know what is the matter with her?"

The priest began shaking his handkerchief out at the casement. "Don't like wasps," he repeated. And Miss Pomeroy found a sudden question creeping up in her mind: was he purposely avoiding the subject?

"We have been almost as sisters, father; I and Sybilla; and, night after night, as I lie down on my pillow, I think of her as she was in the old days, and am ready to weep for sorrow. If I could aid her in her trouble," added Joan, lowering her voice to a whisper, "I should like to do it. It would not be wrong, would it?"

"Certainly not: to aid the sick or afflicted is never wrong. But," he added, turning from the casement to face Joan, "I would advise you, my daughter, not to attempt it in this case. *You could not do any good.* Sybilla has entered upon a new course; and, it seems to me, that she should be left to follow it."

He said good-day, and passed from the room. Just as though it were the easiest way of ending the topic, thought Joan in her surprise. But—though strictly obedient to her spiritual adviser in every essential matter, both by training and by inclination—Joan possessed her own share of the Pomeroy will; and she did not see the necessity for obedience in this. The good father no doubt wished to spare her pain—perhaps to spare her from contact with an erring woman.

And Miss Pomeroy, following out her opinion, put on her bonnet there and then, and walked down to the gamekeeper's lodge.

Sybilla, looking more sickly than she had looked before, received Miss Pomeroy with less of emotion than then, and soon recovered her equanimity. Joan spoke plainly, but Sybilla would admit nothing. They sat together on the little sofa: the sweet red roses, trailing over the open casement, looking in upon them; the serene blue sky above seeming as a very type of heaven.

"We were girls together, Sybilla, though I was some years the elder; we were firm friends at the convent school," pleaded Joan. "If you, as seems to be only too apparent, have fallen into trouble, let me help you. You have neither mother nor sister; no one, as it were, to protect you; you were confiding, unsuspecting; but the world is evil, and carries its evil ways into many an innocent retreat. Oh, Sybilla, tell me all the truth, and let me help you!"

The scalding tears rolled slowly down Sybilla's cheeks; her beautiful, deep-blue eyes were averted: but if ever a clasp of the hand expressed intense gratitude, hers did as it lay in Joan's.

"There is nothing that I can tell you; nothing," she faintly said. "But I thank you for your goodness, your condensation, dear Miss Pomeroy; I thank you from my very heart. I shall ever remember it."

Joan's benevolence froze a little. The tone of Sybilla's denial was unmistakably firm.

"I have come to you out of compassion, Sybilla, and against advice. No one, as you know, would be less likely to countenance wrong-doing than I; it has cost me something to offer to condone it now."

"But you are mistaken," returned Sybilla, speaking faintly again. "I have nothing to acknowledge, nothing to confess. Indeed, Miss Pomeroy, you are mistaking me."

"Does your appearance belie you?" questioned Joan, severely. "Do you deny that you are ill?"

"I am ill; that is true. Since the excessive heat came in, I have felt languid—without energy."

"Why do you muffle yourself in a shawl—why do you refuse to see Mr. Norris?" abruptly asked Joan.

"In spite of the weather, I feel cold, am often shivering,"

replied Sybilla, shivering even as she spoke. "As to Mr. Norris, he could do me no good."

"What would our good Lady Abbess say to this? What would Sister Mildred say?"

Sybilla was silent.

"Some days ago, when your father spoke to me about your illness, I promised to tell him what I thought of you—and now I dread to meet him. If you refuse me your confidence now, Sybilla; refuse to allow me to be your friend; you refuse for good, understand. It is the last time I shall ever ask you."

"But, indeed, there is no confidence that I can give you," persisted Sybilla, still in the same faint tone, her tears dropping quickly. Bending her head, she suddenly kissed Joan's hand. The latter rose.

"This is all then, Sybilla, that is to come of my offer?"

"May Heaven bless you, dear Miss Pomeroy. Think of me—think of me as leniently as you can."

A burst of sobs had caused the break in the words. Joan, annoyed and disappointed, uttered some slighting words.

"Our intercourse ceases from this hour, Sybilla. I wish you well through your trouble; but from henceforth we are strangers."

She swept away with all her native dignity. Sybilla closed the door, and flew up to her chamber in an agony of sobs and tears.

Better, they had deemed the lord that morning, little thinking it was the last that would ever dawn for him. In the course of the day it became known that he was dying. Towards evening, when a sort of stupor had replaced the commotion which the dire news had occasioned in the household, and he was alone with his two sons, Joan, and Father Andrew, he began to speak of the earthly interests he was about to leave.

"Mind, Guy," he suddenly cried, after a rather prolonged silence, "Jerome is to have the keep. He is getting in years, and may not care to remain in your service. You, also, with a young wife, may prefer a younger man at the

head of your household. He can go to the keep at once, if he chooses; I have told him so; or he may take service with you a little longer first, as he and you may please. He has saved sufficient from his wages, and I have left him something more; and it is my desire that the keep shall be his to reside in, so long as he shall live. You hear me, Guy."

"Yes, father, certainly."

"Give him the keep for his home, to have exclusive control over, just as though it were his, absolutely; at his death, of course, it will be free again, and your own. Give me your promise."

"I promise, father," said Guy, rather wondering at the lord's seeming anxiety upon a matter that had virtually been settled long ago. "I promise faithfully."

"Father, I also promise," added Rupert.

Guy looked at his brother, a stern expression curling his imperfect lip at what he deemed Rupert's superfluous interference. "Why need you promise?" he asked, in a low tone. "You will never be the abbey's ruler."

"I spoke in case it should lapse to me during Jerome's lifetime," returned Rupert.

At which suggested possibility Guy's lip took a still deeper curl. He was likely to live as long as Rupert: perhaps longer, for he took better care of himself.

The old man died; died before the first glimmer of dawn. And Guy was the Lord of Pomeroy.

The death of a Lord of Pomeroy involved a great deal of ceremony and state. The very first thing to be done, according to the usages of the family, was to hoist the death flag.

A large, melancholy-looking flag, with the Pomeroy escutcheon upon it. It was always kept at the keep, in its appointed place. This flag, brought at once by two of the upper servants, was hoisted half-mast high over the great entrance-gates, to be left there as long as the corpse remained above ground. The flag was white and the escutcheon black; and, altogether, as it waved about in the

wind, it put spectators in mind of a death's head and cross-bones.

The dead Lord of Pomeroy was conveyed to the chapel, there to lie in state until the day of interment—another of the Pomeroy customs—and to be visited by as many visitors as chose to attire themselves in decorous mourning. The younger sons, George and Leolin, were written to; only one of them, George, was able to respond to the call; and he but briefly. Captain George Pomeroy had obtained a great deal of absence lately for his own pleasure; now that he required it as a duty, it was charily accorded him.

Captain Pomeroy arrived in the afternoon of the day previous to the funeral, considerably put out by the length of the passage from Ireland. Had that not been contrary, he might have stayed at home somewhat longer: as it was, his stay must be confined to less than thirty hours. He was a light-hearted, good-natured young man, his face pleasant and fresh-coloured, with the fine Pomeroy features, but, in other respects, bearing little resemblance to his elder brothers, and he was much shorter and slighter than they were. George Pomeroy was liked by all classes, high and low, and he was Joan's favourite brother. The youngest of them all, Leolin, was ill with fever and not able to come, to his own and their regret.

It was a grand show, that funeral: always made so for a Lord of Pomeroy. Priests, high in the Romish Church, came from all quarters to celebrate the mass; people of consideration flocked to it from far and near. He was buried in the family vault underneath the chapel. Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, followed first and alone as chief mourner; it was the custom of the lords to do so; Rupert and George walked after him together; and so on. Following the principal guests was John Gaunt; then came surgeons, lawyers, and others; and lastly the male servants, headed by Jerome. A great funeral; one to be talked of afterwards by the rustics of Abbeyland.

And so, Hugh, Lord of Pomeroy, was left in his resting-place; and Guy, his son, entered upon his reign.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE STILE.

"AND, now that you have made up your mind to leave me, Joan, may I ask what stay you intend to make? Not as long as the last, I hope."

The speaker was the Lord of Pomeroy. Joan looked vaguely out in the distance, at the blue sky which rose behind the far-off convent chimneys, and did not answer immediately. It was a fair day towards the end of April. The sun was warm, the sky nearly cloudless; the trees and hedgerows had put on their tender green, and the birds were singing. Joan Pomeroy had come into the garden to enjoy it; and was joined by her brother. In a few days she was to depart on a visit to her sister, Mrs. Capel.

"I hardly know," she answered presently, in reply to Guy's question. "Isabel will not part with me readily."

"It will rest with you, Joan; not with Isabel."

"True. But you know what she wanted, Guy?"

"I know that when your father died, she wrote us an absurd proposal that you should make your home with her in future."

"Why do you call it absurd?"

"It was absurd. This is your home. It is right that it should be. And I am your protector."

"You will not miss me, Guy."

"Not miss you! *Merci bien, mademoiselle.*"

"I mean if you marry. Your wife, your children will be all in all to you, as they ought to be. You will not miss me."

"And if I do not marry?"

"In that case, I should always regard the abbey as my home: though I should of course sometimes stay with Isabel. But you will be marrying, will you not, Guy?" she added, rather anxiously.

Guy Pomeroy, who had taken up his sister's black parasol,

which she had not raised, gently flicked the bed of rhododendrons with it, in passing. His face was not less pale than of yore, but somewhat of its former sternness seemed lately to have softened down.

"It does seem rather strange to me, Guy, if I may be allowed for once to allude to the subject," she resumed, "that you do not speak to Alice. For a long, long time past I have thought you would; I thought so, even before poor papa died."

Joan Pomeroy was ignorant, you perceive, of the offer made to Alice Wylde some months ago by the Heir of Pomeroy—and her rejection of him. Guy was not likely to disclose that. Joan believed that his whole heart was given to Alice; that every hope was bound up in her.

"You will marry her, will you not, Guy?"

"Possibly."

"Well, then, don't you see, Guy, that you won't want me? No, nor miss me—when Alice is installed here as your wife."

"Miss you I always shall, Joan. And I desire—mark me—I desire and exact that this shall ever be regarded as your true home. Unless you marry."

"I shall not marry, Guy. Yes, I know what you would say—that I am still somewhat young to say that at thirty; but a conviction, that I shall not, lies within me. I do assure you that I have no wish to marry; I never have had any, and I believe my best happiness will lie in a single life. Perhaps," she added, half laughing, "you and Isabel may come to some compromise—eight months in the year with her, four with you. Of course, the abbey does seem like my real home; I may say it always will in my own mind."

"Why eight months with her and four with me?" demanded Guy. "Do you call that an equable compromise?"

"Isabel is my own sister, Guy. Alice will be only my sister-in-law. Though I dare say we shall be very good friends. Besides——"

"Besides what?" he questioned, for poor Joan had stopped.

"Do you know, Guy, I shall be glad to get away from

here," she added in low, unwilling tones. "For a time, at least. The place is not the same to me since the—the disappearance of Sybilla."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Guy, sharply.

"Ah, but I was very fond of her; I was indeed, Guy. She was a grand, noble girl, one that I surely thought was in fair training for heaven. And when—when she fell from all that was good, it had more effect upon me than the world saw."

The Lord of Pomeroy's brows had gathered into a dark frown. It was evident that condemnation of some one or something, probably of Sybilla herself, was just then making itself heard strongly within him; that the subject was altogether distasteful to him. He vouchsafed no remark.

"Have you any idea where she is, Guy? Do you think her father knows?"

"The less *you* think about it the better," retorted Guy, severely. "What have we to do with the miserable business?"

"Guy"—in the softest whisper—"do you think she is with Rupert?"

Guy Pomeroy turned his dark face upon his sister, surprise in the sharp movement. Hers was bent on the tulip-bed.

"What can possibly induce you to ask that?"

"I—gathered the notion that it might be so, Guy—though I hardly know how," she faltered. "Rupert went away about the same time that she did——"

"Rupert came back again," was the sharp interruption.

"I know he did, for a time. One day Bridget said something in a laughing way, coupling their names together. I checked her at once."

"As I must check you," retorted Guy, in his haughtiest tones. "Put these fancies altogether from your mind, Joan; I command it. Forget Sybilla Gaunt; never allow the subject to recur to you again."

He strode off towards the gardeners, working at a distance, his tall, fine form raised to its greatest height—and there never existed a finer form than that of Guy Pomeroy. Joan

left the garden, her head raised as proudly as his own. Miss Pomeroy very much disliked being put down: no one but Guy ever attempted to do it: and she was just a wee bit vexed with herself for having spoken at all.

Few changes had taken place since the death of the old Lord of Pomeroy. Guy reigned in his stead, and that was about the only difference. All the retainers, numerous though they were, had been kept on by Guy; even old Jerome preferred active service to rest, and the keep for the present remained untenanted.

Some six weeks after the death of the late lord, Sybilla Gaunt was missing. She had disappeared. It was said that Gaunt himself had driven her in a gig to the county town, whence she took the train, and went out into the wide world. But, whether there was any truth at all in this, could not be ascertained. According to another report, Sybilla had run away, abandoning her home and her father, to his terrible consternation, and left not a word behind to say whither she had gone. She did not return; no news was heard of her; it was believed that the gamekeeper received letters from her occasionally, but they were not sent to his house. He performed his duties as usual, just as if no trouble had fallen upon him. No one dared to speak to him of his loss. Gaunt was not a man to be questioned: he could put down impertinence, whether from rich or poor, with as high a hand as the old lord had done in his haughtiest days. How it was, or where Sybilla was, no one knew.

Once only Joan had spoken to Gaunt of Sybilla. It was about a month ago. In passing his lodge she had halted to admire the spring flowers, so abundant, and kept in such perfect order; not perceiving that Gaunt himself was stooping down near the gate. He rose up and they stood face to face. Joan began to speak lightly of the blossoming beds, just as though nothing else could be in either of their thoughts. But there was a sadness in the man's beautiful features, in his fine deep violet eyes, that aroused all Joan's sympathy, and involuntarily she put a question to him, lowering her voice.

"Have you heard of Sybilla? Is she well?"

"She is quite well. Thank you, Miss Pomeroy, for inquiring."

There was a strange earnestness in the man's manner as he spoke his thanks; there was not a look or tone that could be construed into the smallest iota of shame or confusion; never had he given a more self-possessed, fearless answer. Joan said good-morning. She admired the man's Spartan courage, that would not allow it to be seen he felt the disgrace which had come home to him. And literally and truly, that was all that had been heard of Sybilla.

Miss Pomeroy possessed her fortune, and could live where she liked. Not a large fortune, it is true, but considerably more than fell to the share of the three younger brothers, for the old lord had chosen to leave it so. If she made her residence at the abbey this fortune need not be touched, except for dress and similar personal expenses: Guy would have scorned to take money from his sister. If she remained with Mrs. Capel, Joan would contribute her share of the housekeeping, for the Capels were poor.

The small fortune inherited by the younger sons was paid over to them a very few weeks after their father's death. Rupert, who had only waited for it, being short of funds, betook himself at once to London, ostensibly to look after a government appointment of which he had received the promise. Guy graciously intimated to his brother that he was welcome to make the abbey his home until the appointment should be given; but Rupert thought he had better be on the spot "to look the people up;" at least, that was the idea given in his answer. Guy suspected—nay, he knew—that Rupert might have confessed to a more weighty motive than that of "looking up" the government. He had debts, poor fellow: the few thousands inherited from his father would be nothing like enough to settle them, and it might be just as convenient that his place of residence should be a less conspicuous one than Pomeroy Abbey. That was some months ago. Rupert had not received the appointment yet; but Guy had reason to know that he was adding to his debts, instead of paying them. Ready money, and the

temptations of London! an irresistible position for Rupert the thriftless. George Pomeroy was in India, his regiment having been ordered there the previous autumn.

Another lovely spring day, still warmer than yesterday. The hedges seemed to be clothed in a more luxuriant green, the sky to be blue with an earnest of coming summer; the grass, growing long, was intermixed with oxlips, cowslips, and bluebells, and the long deep-pink flowers that children call cuckoos. Alice Wylde, rambling in the fields near her house, had sat down upon a low stile amidst these homely flowers, and thought pensively of the happy years of her childhood, when the greatest of her simple delights had been to go into the meadows and gather them—delights that would never return.

She was deeply unhappy. Loving Rupert Pomeroy with all the intensity of an impassioned and not well-disciplined heart, this long absence from him had seemed like a separation of years. It was September when he went away; it was April now—almost May. All those months, and never to see him, never to hear of him—excepting a word or so dropped now and then by Miss Pomeroy or Guy. He had not written to her: there might be danger in that: neither did she know his address in London. In point of fact, there was no engagement between them; there never had been any; only love.

And Guy, the lord, was wooing her still; wooing her silently. She gave him no encouragement whatever; rather tacitly repelled him. She did not do it openly, not caring to invoke the displeasure of her mother. Joan had wondered why her brother was so dilatory in asking the young lady to be his wife, but Guy was only "biding his time." Discouraged by her manner, he preferred to work his way with her, rather than speak again too soon and provoke a second refusal. But Guy was growing impatient, tired of the delay; and—Alice Wylde is sitting on the low field stile there, looking at the flowers with eyes that see them not.

She steps off the stile and leans against it, for she hears

footsteps approaching; and, though the hedge hides the intruder, she knows them to be the Lord of Pomeroy's.

"Good-morning, Alice."

"Good-morning," she returned, preparing to move away.

"Stay," said Guy, putting his arm before her; "I cannot go on like this; I cannot be shunned for ever, as you are shunning me. If I come up with you out-of-doors, you walk away; if I call at the White House, you will not remain in the room. I have been there now, talking to your mother; and she says, and I say, that matters should be brought to an issue."

"They were so brought long ago," replied Alice. "Only you will not take my answer."

"No, I will never take that answer," returned Guy. "Oh, Alice!" he added, changing his tone to one of deep tenderness, "have compassion upon me! my love for you is eating away my heartstrings."

"I cannot love you," she replied, in a low tone.

"So you have said. I have asked you, as I ask you now, Why?"

"Love is not a thing that can be called up at will. It cannot be bought and sold; as you would barter a jewel."

"Sufficient of it will come at will; if there be no bar. I am ready to take you, and chance it. Is there a bar?" he continued meaningly. "Latterly I have grown to think it." — Alice Wylde hesitated. The persecution—for so she looked upon it in her spirit of opposition—of Guy Pomeroy had become intolerable to her: when she woke in the morning, the consciousness that she should meet him in the day, possibly be forced to listen to his love-making, to a second edition of his offer, would rush over her with a feeling of mingled doubt and despair. That this state of things could not continue, common-sense told her. On her side, she was growing angry and vexed with Rupert: but just at this moment it seemed to her that she must get rid of Guy. What if she told him there was a bar? it might put an end to his hopes and his tormentings. So she spoke out impulsively; not weighing her words.

"If I were to impart to you that there is a bar, would it convince you that your wish to address me cannot be carried out?"

"What is the bar?"

She did not answer. A wave of something that looked like terror passed over Guy's face. His voice became strangely agitated.

"Not that of love!—of love for another! Oh, Alice, do not say it!"

"I must say it, if I am to speak the truth," she whispered. "I do love another."

Guy's face took a darker expression. "Has another dared to woo you?"

"Dared?"

"Yes—dared. For it must have been done in secret—in dishonour. Your mother knows nothing of this."

"I would ask the Lord of Pomeroy to spare me—to my mother as to himself."

"Alice, this is no child's play. I have a right to inquire into this matter, to be told the whole truth. Who is it that has dared to come between us?"

In her inmost heart Alice thought that the sentence might have been changed; that the one to "come between" was Guy himself—between her and Rupert.

"If you will not accord me an explanation, Alice, I must ask it of your mother. Oh, my dear, why won't you trust me?" he continued in softer tones. "Confide in me as in your best friend: you have never a warmer one."

"It is your brother," she faltered, her voice falling to a whisper.

"My brother!" repeated Guy, looking at her in amazement. "Which brother?"

"Rupert."

A minute elapsed before Guy took in the sense of the words. So unconscious had he been of any such pretension on Rupert's part that he thought even now he must have misunderstood her.

"It cannot be," he said. "Rupert?"

"Alas, yes! He is my best-beloved."

Alice had heard of the passion that on occasion Guy Pomeroy could fall into. It arose now. Bewildered, confused, in his bitter disappointment, his dearest hopes thrown back upon him, he hardly knew what he uttered.

"Rupert!" he foamed. "Rupert! the ill-doing spend-thrift! the disgrace to the name of Pomeroy! who is now in hiding, lest his reckless debts should be visited upon him; whose light conduct here in Abbeyland would be a byword in men's mouths, but that he is a Pomeroy! who—— But I do not believe you," suddenly broke off Guy, his passion cooling down, as he revolved the past in the light of common sense. He could not remember that Rupert and she had been sufficiently intimate for love to ensue. "It is a mistake, Alice. You never saw much of Rupert, or he of you."

Alice leaned against the top bar of the stile. She did not reply; but the rich flush of love, remembered love, mantled her cheek, and her lips parted with a half-smile. It maddened Guy.

"Do you wish to drive me wild?" he asked, scorning concealment. "Why don't you say that you never met him—in love; that you are asserting what is false, only to deceive me?"

"I have said what is true. And, as to not meeting, I should be sorry to meet you in secret, as I have met Rupert."

"You—a gentlewoman—and my promised wife—can stand there and avow that you have met Rupert Pomeroy in secret?"

"I am not your promised wife," retorted Alice, bent on vexing him in her own sense of discomfort. "And there was no other way in which we could meet, for you had gained the ear of my mother. If we did meet in secret, where was the harm? do you think Rupert would permit harm to come near me?"

"He—made love to you?"

"Yes; he loved me. When you were paying your formal visits in the day, Rupert paid his in the evening. We used to walk about in yonder grove—and oh, we were so happy!"

The Lord of Pomeroy turned his face from Alice, bending it to the ground: it was well, perhaps, she did not see it then. His love for her was indeed as a volcano raging within him: he could not give her up; far rather would he have given up life and all its benefits. What could have possessed her to meet him in this spirit of bravado? Guy was not one to bear it tamely, or to be cheated of his revenge. As to Alice—she should be his, even if he died for it. And death seemed, in his present mood, to be far too good for his treacherous brother.

"Alice," he said, compelling his tone to an unnatural calmness, "your love is worse than wasted, if it be given to Rupert Pomeroy."

"Wasted?"

"Yes, he had none to waste; or to give to you."

Again the rich flush of remembrance dyed her cheeks, and her lips were parted with the same sweet smile. Guy kept down his temper.

"I say Rupert Pomeroy had no love to give to you. He deceived you if he professed it; he was only amusing himself."

"You shall not traduce him to me," she interrupted, with spirit. "I will not listen to it. You know the motive which has obliged me to confide this to you—that you may turn your hopes elsewhere. Keep my secret, Guy, and be generous: perhaps I shall be your sister some time."

"Walk with me a little way, Alice," he suddenly exclaimed. "Not far."

Mechanically she obeyed, for his tone was imperative. Guy offered her his arm; but she bowed a refusal.

"You would take Rupert's," he cried, with reproachful scorn. And then chafed in spirit for having said it.

"It is not the custom for young ladies to walk arm-in-arm in public, and I am quite alive to these exactions," she added, throwing back her head.

"Custom!" retorted Guy—"between a man and woman who are to form the closest tie on earth?"

"Did you speak of yourself, or of Rupert?" she returned, wilfully aggravating. And Guy Pomeroy, after a look

that must have betrayed the bitterness of his heart, walked by her side in silence. But all this only tended to augment the resentment that was shaking his every fibre. If ever a man had been desperately ill-used on earth, he believed that it was himself.

The next field brought them within view of the game-keeper's lodge. The windows were closed, the house seemed deserted: it often looked so, now Sybilla was gone. Old Nanny liked solitude. Guy stopped, laid his forefinger on Alice's arm, and caused her to turn towards it.

"You see that place, Alice?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"Look at it. Study it well."

"It is Gaunt's cottage," she exclaimed, wonderingly.

"Why am I to look at it?"

"Because *there* was where Rupert's love was given."

She was slow in comprehending. No suspicion of the sort had ever dawned upon her. (Guy's words only called up thoughts of the gamekeeper and the cottage: not of Sybilla. Guy, saying no more for the moment, turned homewards with her. Presently he spoke.

"There are certain topics, Alice, that we may not discuss openly; custom, which you profess to honour, does not sanction it; the proprieties of life would not sanction it; nevertheless, some of this reserve must be forgotten, even to a young lady, when circumstances imperatively demand it."

Alice Wyldé turned her wondering eyes upon him.

"You know that Sybilla Gaunt has left the place," he resumed, in low, deep tones: "you know, at least it is probable that you do, why she was obliged to leave it."

"Well?"

"She is with Rupert."

Silence ensued. Guy glanced around. Alice was walking on, but he could not see her face.

"The author of the disrepute that fell upon Sybilla Gaunt was Rupert Pomeroy," continued Guy: "he who ought to have guarded her from it. Rupert—I tell it you fearlessly, Alice, for it is the truth—is heartless as he is high. And so—he pretended that his whole love was yours!"

"It was—*hers*?"

"Yes; he is both base and false."

As a blast of lightning falls upon a tree, and shatters it, so were these words falling upon Alice Wylde's brain. At the end of the last field, which skirted Mrs. Wylde's garden, Guy walked forward and held the gate open for her to pass through. He could have broken again into passion, had he been sure that her emotion arose from love of Rupert: her countenance was white with agony.

"Is it true?" she gasped.

"It is true as that you and I are here."

CHAPTER VI.

TRIUMPH.

WALKING slowly towards the open window of the dining-room, the footsteps of the Lord of Pomeroy echoing in her ears as he strode from the garden-gate, went Alice Wylde, feeling as if the best part of her life had been crushed out of her.

Remembrance was busy within her; events of the past were rising up, trifles which had caused her no reflection at the time. She remembered once to have made a slighting remark to Rupert of Sybilla Gaunt, and Rupert had abruptly changed the theme. Again she remembered, in driving home with her mother from a dinner-party, one moonlight night, at which they had met the lord and Guy, but not Rupert, who had sent an excuse, that she saw Rupert standing by the trees at Gaunt's cottage; and there was another undefined shadow near his: the gamekeeper's she had concluded, and she had wondered why Rupert had gone down there so late. Of course that shadow must have been Sybilla's.

How was it that she had been so blind? Who but Rupert,

with his fascinating manners and his handsome form, with his careless principles and indifference to consequences, was likely to have turned the head of Sybilla? The lower people about her?—Sybilla would have spurned them under foot. Times and again she had wondered to herself with a hazy sort of indifference who the recreant truant could be. How could she have been so unsuspecting? The very fact of Sybilla's quitting the place with Rupert—or almost at the same period—might have opened her eyes.

The revulsion of feeling to Alice was terrible: all her love seemed to be thrown back upon herself, just as she in her turn had been throwing back Guy's. She could have wept tears of agony at the thought of how Rupert the false must have laughed at her credulity. She, who had told him of her rejection of Guy; of her refusal to become the Lady of Pomeroy for his sake. Together they had made fun of the lord and of his hopes. Oh, blind, blind, blind!

In her way, Alice Wylde was no less vindictive than Guy. Already she began to wonder how she could be avenged on Rupert. There was one way, if she could bring herself to take it, that would at least show Rupert she did not care for him: she could accept Guy.

The opening of the gate, as she stood still thinking these thoughts, caused her to turn. Guy had come back again.

"Alice," he began, "when——"

"Say nothing to me now," she interrupted, her tone a mixture of fierceness and despair, "or I shall be visiting the hate upon you that I am beginning to feel for Rupert. If he has thus trifled with me—if he has a false heart——"

"He has a false one," said Guy. "He lives only to trifle. You are not the first he has professed to love; nor was Sybilla, either. The village could tell you various tales."

The village could do so. Many a foolish escapade had been laid, rightly or wrongly, at the door of the gay and attractive Rupert. But the village held its peace, for was he not a Pomeroy?—and, amongst the simple around, it was pretty generally held that the Pomeroy, like kings, could do no wrong.

The Lord of Pomeroy spoke his farewell and departed:

Alice did not answer him, but went on indoors. Not that she intended any particular discourtesy towards him, but her mind was in a tumult. "To come to me with his false vows, from the company of that girl!" she muttered to herself; "to win my love; to play upon my credulity; to sport with my heart's most sacred feelings; and then return to whence he came—to her! Oh, mercy! how shall I support myself?"

A little voice came whispering to her, Is it true? or is Guy deceiving you? She thought it was true; the probabilities, looking back, seemed to say that it was so. But she went to her mother, who was on her dressing-room sofa, deep in the pages of a fashionable novel, and asked a question boldly. Little cared she, in her despair, for what Guy had called the proprieties of life.

"Mother, who was it that led Sybilla Gaunt into the wrong path?"

Now it happened that Mrs. Wylde was particularly alive to the proprieties at that moment; for the book before her was of the most orthodox school: filled with holy little village children and young clergymen with long (and very unbecoming) black skirts, and who had never heard of "wrong paths," much less come into contact with them. Therefore Mrs. Wylde bent a severe brow on Alice.

"Young lady! such topics are ignored in society. What are you thinking of?"

"I want to know who it was that led Sybilla Gaunt into sin," proceeded Alice, plunging deeper into the mire.

She stood before her mother with a pale face and eye of dark misery, and it brought down Mrs. Wylde from her stilts.

"Alice, what in the world is the matter? What is Sybilla Gaunt to you? It was not Guy Pomeroy; therefore——"

"Was it Rupert?"

"Child, I say, these subjects are better let alone. What has come to you? Of course it was Rupert: every one knows that."

"Why did not the village shun him? He was popular; he was courted up to the very hour he left it,"

"The village shun a Pomeroy!" derisively retorted Mrs. Wylde. "If a Pomeroy chose to tell them they must sell their souls to him, they would only kneel and do it. That is enough, Alice; the topic is not a suitable one for you."

But now Mrs. Wylde, in her zeal, or perhaps, it may be said, in her animus against Rupert, spoke more surely than she had grounds for. In talking one day with her own maid, a flighty, gossiping damsel named Lettice, she had introduced the subject of Sybilla and her misdoings. "Who can have been her admirer?" spoke Mrs. Wylde. "Oh, ma'am, that's not known," said the girl, "but I'd lay something it's that good-looking Mr. Rupert Pomeroy." Not another hint, excepting this, had Mrs. Wylde heard: and yet she took upon herself to make this confident assertion to her daughter.

It chanced, this same day, that Joan Pomeroy called at the White House, with the information that she was about to leave the abbey for a season. Left alone with Alice for a moment, the latter approached her with an eager whisper.

"Miss Pomeroy, please tell me: was it known who—who ran away with Sybilla Gaunt?"

Miss Pomeroy looked surprised. She disdained to equivocate, and therefore did not reply. "Are you ill, Alice?" she asked, noting the girl's paleness.

"I have heard that it was your brother Rupert," resumed Alice, her eyes strained on Joan with a wild expectancy not pleasant to look upon.

Joan Pomeroy bowed her head. "I do not know, myself."

"But you cannot tell me it was *not* he!"

"No, I cannot. I ask, Alice, if you are ill?"

"Oh no," she answered, with a hollow laugh: "I am very well."

Meanwhile, Guy Pomeroy, smarting under the treatment accorded him by one he loved so passionately, stung to the heart at the deceit practised upon him by his brother, proceeded home with a step that had a sound of fury in it. Only that very morning application had been made to him on behalf of Rupert by Mr. Hildyard, their family solicitor in London. Rupert had been arrested upon a "judgment"

that had been obtained against him, and unless the Lord of Pomeroy came forward to extricate him, he must go to the Queen's Bench prison. Guy had been wavering all the morning as to whether he should respond to this appeal or not. He had not too much cash to spare, and he quite believed that if he extricated Rupert from this mess, he would be in a similar one to-morrow; but still Guy was not altogether unbrotherly, and he did not care to hear of a Pomeroy being sent to prison. The matter had been filling his mind up to the hour of his visit at the White House, argument for, answering argument against: but what he had heard decided him now.

Opening his desk, he penned a sharp, brief note to the solicitor.

"DEAR MR. HILDYARD,

"The arrest of my brother Rupert is, no doubt, only the precursor of many other similar arrests. In fact, how he has been allowed to go scot-free so long, surprises me. Nothing that you or he could say would induce me to interfere; and I desire that you will not appeal to me again, now or later. With regard to the Queen's Bench, a sojourn within its walls may do him good. This decision, so far as I am concerned, is final.

"POMEROY OF POMEROY."

This was the usual signature of the Lords of Pomeroy. And thus, the appeal being unfavourable, Mr. Rupert Pomeroy was escorted to prison. So far as appearances might be trusted, his stay there would not be a short one.

In the course of the following afternoon, the Lord of Pomeroy arrived at the White House in all the state which it pleased the Pomeroyes to observe on occasions of importance, and which was nothing unusual at that time: a gilded carriage with his arms emblazoned on it, four prancing horses, attendant servants in their sumptuous liveries of purple velvet and silver. Tormented almost to madness, Guy Pomeroy had determined to put his fate to the trial, without further delay, and to make his proposals in due form.

"Oh, my goodness!" cried Mrs. Wylde, running to the window upon hearing the clatter below—"Alice, it is the Lord of Pomeroiy! And he has come in state! What can it mean?"

Alice, looking pale enough for a ghost, for she had passed just such a restless, sleepless night as Guy, pushed her pretty hair from her face in consternation. "He might have given me another day or two," she murmured.

"Another what?" cried Mrs. Wylde.

"Another day or two for thought," sighed Alice. "I suppose he has come for—for my answer."

"Has he made you an offer?"

"He has renewed it, mamma. He made it before the old lord died."

"Oh, you crafty child! Never to tell me!"

"I refused him. I told him I would never, never have him; that he was never more to speak to me upon the subject. But yesterday he spoke again."

"Well?"

A message interrupted them: the Lord of Pomeroiy waited to see Mrs. Wylde.

"Now, Alice, what am I to say to the lord?" asked the mother, suppressed anger in her tone.

"I am sure I don't know," sighed Alice, looking the very image of perplexity and despair.

"What do you mean by that, you wayward girl? *Not know?* You can do but one thing—accept him."

"There's so much to be said on both sides the question," pleaded Alice. "I—do—not—like—him—you know; but——"

"*I know!*" broke in Mrs. Wylde. "Don't bring my name in like that, Alice. If you don't like him, you ought to be ashamed of yourself; that's all I know. You have done your best to flirt with him. You have drawn him on."

"Ah no, not lately, mamma; not for many months now. I did—perhaps—flirt with him a little for fun once; but it must be as much as a year ago."

"You did more than flirt a little with him for fun; you

did all you could to lead him on to love you," spoke the angry lady impressively. "And you succeeded. If ever man loved woman, Guy loves you—and your life with him will be as one long, happy daydream. The Lady of Pomeroy!" continued she in an ecstasy. "Mistress of Pomeroy Abbey! Why, for that position, Alice, half the girls in the county are languishing! And it is at *your* feet. Surely you will not be so idiotic as to play with the lord any longer?"

"Yes, I know—I admit there is a great deal to be said on both sides," assented Alice.

"Well, I must not keep him waiting. And, Alice, I shall accept him."

"No, don't do that," Alice replied, in quick fear. "If I accept him, I will do it myself. But I must speak to him in private first."

Guy had come to lay his formal proposals for her daughter's hand before Mrs. Wylde; and he did so. Flattered, delighted, the hopes and the doubts which had tormented her laid to rest, Mrs. Wylde received them in the most gracious, not to say gushing manner. Alice was shy, she told him; uncertain; it was in the nature of maidens to be so; but she was sure she cared for the lord at heart, and would doubtless accept the honour done her, and listen to his suit. The lord, upon that, requested to see Alice; and the mother retired, to send her in.

"You know, Guy," Alice answered, when he held her hands, and put the question to her almost as formally as he had put it to her mother, "that I have told you I cared for Rupert——"

"Yes, yes," he frowningly interrupted.

"And therefore I do not—in that way—care for you, for we cannot care for two people at once; it is impossible. It was *true*—what you told me of him—about Sybilla Gaunt?"

"It was true."

"Then I shall never, never care for him again, and I will try never to think of him. From henceforth, my best endeavours shall be to hate Rupert Pomeroy."

"And to love me," he softly whispered.

"That will come in time."

"My darling, that is all I ask. And you will be my dear wife?"

"I will: I promise. But you must please understand one thing, Guy—that but for Rupert's having played me false, I never could have married you. I mention it by way of excuse for what you may have deemed my ill-conduct to you all this while. Rupert——"

"We may drop Rupert's name now," again interrupted Guy, showing impatience even at the mention of his brother.

"Yes; and drop it for ever," acquiesced Alice. "Traitor!"

* * * * *

The news went forth to the local world. The Lord of Pomeroy—the great man amidst its great men—had chosen his consort; he was to espouse the daughter of Mrs. Wylde, whom he, as was shrewdly suspected, had been for some time courting. The young lady was not of distinguished descent; of no descent at all, in fact; but she had both riches and beauty.

Gaily and swiftly went on the preparations for the wedding; both Mrs. Wylde and Guy urging a speedy day. Perhaps neither of them, remembering the past, felt quite sure that Alice, in her caprice, might not waver again. Joan Pomeroy put off her visit; and consented to remain at the abbey for the ceremony. Her sister, Mrs. Capel, would come for it, and they would depart together when the gaieties were over.

The village of Abbeyland lay in a hollow. On its right, looking towards the sea, rose the very long and gentle hill, winding and turning until it reached the forest: the White House being about midway between the forest and the abbey. Sheltered within the skirts of this dark forest was an old and lonely cottage, inhabited by an old woman named Naomi Rex.

In the days gone by, there had been a rather large colony of Rexes in Abbeyland—all close and staunch adherents of the Lords of Pomeroy. Some had been in their personal service—valets or house-stewards; and one had held the post of head gamekeeper before Gaunt. An ordinary keeper was he, re-

ceiving his wages ; not, as Gaunt was, a "gentleman keeper." All the male Rexes had died out ; of the women there remained three : Malvina Rex, who was housekeeper at the abbey, and was called Mrs. Rex, though she had never married ; Naomi Rex, who was the old widow of Anthony Rex, the housekeeper's brother ; and Bridget Rex, who was daughter to another deceased brother, and who lived at the abbey with her aunt. Naomi Rex, the widow, lived in the cottage in the forest, upon a small, comfortable income realized by her late husband : the late Lord of Poméröy having accorded her the use of the cottage for life. These Rexes knew as much about the traditions of the Pomeröys, and about themselves too, as long-retained servants in a family generally do know. The Rexes had always been respected by the villagers ; treated by them with more consideration than they showed to one another, in regard to their having been confidential retainers of the lords of the soil.

It wanted about a week to the wedding, for which all sorts of great preparations were agate, when Mrs. Wylde chanced one hot morning to pass the cottage in the forest, and saw Naomi. Naomi was popularly supposed to be falling into her dotage. Like many imaginative persons, who, when they get into years, are fonder of ruminating on the past than of talking of the present, she would sit for hours on the bench outside her door in silence, her eyes fixed on the landscape that rose before her, the most conspicuous feature of which was the abbey, and her mind lost in the days that had been. It was thus that Mrs. Wylde found her. That lady, who had not felt well of late, and had moreover a horrible fear upon her that she was growing frightfully stout, was ordered by Mr. Norris to take as much walking exercise as possible ; she often passed the cottage in her walks, and had made acquaintance with its tenant.

"Good-morning, Naomi."

"Good-morning to you, madam," replied Naomi, roused out of her reverie, and getting up to curtsy, with her habitual respect, and to remain standing as long as Mrs. Wylde chose to halt at her salings. The manners then observed by the humbler classes towards their betters were

very different from those obtaining in these degenerate days ; moreover, Naomi Rex knew that Mrs. Wylde was the mother of the future Lady of Pomeroy. It was the highest position in the whole world, in poor Naomi's estimation : princes were, no doubt, great and grand ; but the Pomeroy's were greater.

"Would you please to condescend to walk in and rest, ma'am," asked Naomi, observing that her visitor's comely face looked warm and tired. "It's shady in my little parlour."

"I don't mind if I do," said Mrs. Wylde. "One feels the hill in this sultry weather. Stay ; no ; not indoors ; I should prefer this bench," she added, sitting down on the bench from which Naomi had risen. "How pleasant it is here !"

"Ay, ma'am, it is. Would you please to note the sweep o' landscape. The fair plain, the bold rocks, and yonder sea ; the abbey right before one's eyes, and the blessed convent in the distance, like a peaceful haven !"

"It all looks peaceful to me, after that dreadful hill. But you must sit down yourself, Mrs. Rex."

"Thank] you, madam, no," curtsied the old lady. "I would rather stand."

"Unless you take the very place from which I disturbed you, I shall go away again," said Mrs. Wylde, firmly. And Naomi, who knew proper manners, sat down at once. She was a cleanly-looking old lady, with a pale, thin face, wearing a big-bordered cap with black bows ; a short dark gown, and a black-and-white print kerchief crossed upon her shoulders, which partially hid the small, beautiful cross of gold and blue enamel, that lay on her neck.

"I hope this day next week will be as fine as this one !" impulsively spoke Mrs. Wylde, following out her thoughts : and they were rarely absent now from the approaching ceremony.

"The saints grant it !" acquiesced Naomi.

Mrs. Wylde, recalled to the present, laughed. "You know, then, what is to take place on that day ?"

"Know !" exclaimed Naomi, surprised at the question. "Ma'am, could I be off knowing aught that concerns a Pomeroy ? Especially so momentous an event as the

marriage of the lord! I trust, to my heart, the lord is marrying for his happiness: and the sweet young lady too. I trust that it is not in *his* day the prediction is to be fulfilled."

Now, if Mrs. Wylde had just spoken on impulse, so most assuredly had Naomi, in saying this. All the morning long, one certain subject, *this* subject, had been haunting her mind. Aware of the slip she had made, she was hasting to speak of something else, but Mrs. Wylde caught her up sharply.

"Prediction! What do you mean? Prediction of what?"

"There used to be a prediction talked of in the Pomeroy family, when the late lord was young," calmly answered Naomi, silently crossing herself. "Hardly an ancient family in the land, ma'am, but has its beliefs and its forecastings."

"Doubtless," assented Mrs. Wylde, with dignity, as if to imply that she was of ancient family herself. "What was the prediction about?"

"It was just a verse of rhyme, ma'am; four lines, maybe; though I don't call to mind, at this moment, how they run."

"And what did they predict?"

"They tell of some ill-fortune that is to fall upon the Pomeroy's, after the marriage of one of the lords. But it's a marriage that must be entered into with deceit and craft—so it is not likely to fall in these days, for the Pomeroy's are honourable, and disdain a lie. I remember hearing the late lord joke about it to his lady soon after their marriage, saying that it could not fall in his time, since he had not fulfilled its conditions."

"What nonsense it must be!" cried Mrs. Wylde. "Who made it up—who spoke it?"

"No one knows that, madam. It is some generations ago now."

Mrs. Wylde burst into laughter. It must be confessed that she had little reverence for such superstitions, and would as soon have believed in a ghost itself as in a "prediction."

"Then I think the present lord has no need to fear. If generation after generation has been passed over, surely his

will not prove the exception. The Pomeroy's are very fanciful, are they not?" added Mrs. Wylde, consigning the subject to the oblivion it deserved.

"They have their opinions, ma'am, and their traditions. All old families have."

"You have seen a great deal of the Pomeroy's in your time?"

"Ay, ma'am, I have. I was a Rex, ma'am, you see, and cousin to my late husband; and the Rexes have always been close servants of the Pomeroy's. Old Jerome's mother, by the way, was a Rex too, but only distantly related to us. The late lady took a good deal of notice of me."

"You had no children, I think?"

"No, ma'am, never. It sometimes falls out, I've remarked, that when, man and wife are cousins they don't have any."

Mrs. Wylde nodded. "I suppose you will go to see the ceremony?"

"Doubtless, ma'am. The lord himself bade my sister-in-law, the housekeeper, invite me to the abbey for the day, and they'll send for me betimes. It's but a slip of a walk round to the chapel from thence, and I can manage that. I would not be off seeing the wedding for a good deal."

"What sort of a young man is the youngest son?" asked Mrs. Wylde, who never lost an opportunity of learning information about the family she so revered.

"Charming young men, both the younger ones," exclaimed Naomi Rex, warmly. "Not so grand in stature as the lord and Mr. Rupert, but fresh and fair-looking as a summer's day. Mr. Leolin is a bit haughty in manner like the lord; but Mr. George—Captain Pomeroy they call him now—is just a favourite with everybody. He takes after his mother."

"I have seen him: he was here when we first settled at the place," remarked Mrs. Wylde. "But I did not see him when he came to the funeral."

"His stay was so short, ma'am. Short as it was, though, he came up to see me between the lights—bless him! He was kept back two whole days by a hurricane in crossing from Ireland—as maybe you heard at the time, ma'am."

"Oh, the sea is dreadful," remarked Mrs. Wylde. "We

had a three-days' gale off the Cape when I was coming from India; the waves rising mountains high and beating us back every minute. I was never so frightened in my life. And now I must go," she added, beginning to arrange the strings of her grey chip bonnet, which she had loosened; "but I must first ask you to give me a glass of water."

Naomi called to her little maid, Ann, and the water was brought. Then Mrs. Wylde turned to pursue her way.

"What a beautiful cross!" she exclaimed in admiration, catching sight of the ornament as Naomi bent forward to close the gate after her.

"It never leaves my neck, ma'am, night or day, save when I want to renew the ribbon; I look upon it as a charm," spoke the old woman.

"Some relic, I suppose?"

"A relic of the Pomeroy's, madam. My late lady gave it to me after Master Leolin was born. Her maid was ill at the time, and the nurse was taken ill; a sort of epidemic, I suppose it was, and they sent for me. My lady liked me to be about her; and though the two young women soon got well, she kept me for six weeks, and gave me this cross when I left. Oh, she was a considerate, sweet-tempered lady—and Master George is the very model of her. Good-day, madam; my service to you."

Mrs. Wylde walked slowly home, her thoughts running in a desultory sort of way upon the interview. A lovely cross, she said to herself, quite out of place upon that old woman's wrinkled neck; it was perfectly absurd to have given it to her. If Captain George were as indiscriminate as his mother in such matters, she should not say very much for his sense. And what autocrats the Pomeroy's seemed always to have been!—and how proud this old creature was of having served them! Thus Mrs. Wylde's reflections ran on, from one point to another—but never once did they recur to the "Prediction."

The days sped quickly onward, and the eve of the wedding arrived. Visitors, in the shape of Mr. and Mrs. Capel, came to the abbey; one or two to the White House: but the guests would chiefly assemble on the day only.

In the afternoon Alice sat in her own room, her maid Theresa busily packing. Only a small trunk of clothes would be conveyed to the abbey that evening; the rest would follow later. The Lords of Pomeroy disdained to follow the world's ordinary forms and customs, and Alice would on the morrow proceed direct to her new home.

Alice Wylde had borne up bravely. She would not allow herself to recall the past; she thought she was successfully putting the recreant Rupert from her heart; and she did her best to *like* the Lord of Pomeroy, to look forward to a happy life with him. Only, now and again, some slight incident would arise that served to bring back to memory a scene of happier days, and her whole frame would thrill with anguish. One of these occurred now.

"Are these flowers to go in, Miss Alice?"

"Flowers?" repeated Alice, listlessly. "What flowers? How you worry, Theresa!"

"These, miss, that were between this tissue paper in your little drawer," replied Theresa. "Here's a rose, and a—what is it?—a white geranium, I think, Miss Alice, but they are dried up beyond knowing."

Alice turned to the flowers—she had overlooked them when casting away others—and the tide of memory came rushing over her. They were the last *he* had ever given her, and too well she remembered *how* they were given; his words and his looks of love. She buried her face in her hands, and gave vent to a groan of pain.

It was all over now; he was false, and gone. Gone, never to return. The last evening they had clandestinely met, Rupert was late; when he came he had these flowers in his hand, a blush rose and a white geranium, and he put them into hers. All that sweet romance was over; henceforth her heart must content itself with the most prosaic reality.

"Flowers!" she cried, indifferently, turning to Theresa, who was on her knees before the trunk. "Some old dried things, I suppose, that have lain there and been forgotten. Throw them down with the other rubbish, Theresa."

Theresa let the flowers fall upon the carpet amidst the

discarded odds and ends lying there. She was resuming her packing, when her ear caught the sound of footsteps through the open window, and she stretched up her head to look below.

"Miss Alice, here's the Lord of Pomeroy."

He had come, had he!—in spite of Mrs. Wylde's having laughingly told him that, according to rules of etiquette, a bridegroom must not see his bride on the eve of the wedding-day. It was not "etiquette" that could keep Guy Pomeroy from her he loved.

Alice knew she must go to him. And why should she not? Was he not to be her husband ere many hours had passed? But her thoughts had been turned to the events which she had latterly striven to bury, and, as she went down, an impulse arose—long afterwards she used to wonder why it should so have arisen—to speak of them to Guy. Have we not all been unaccountably swayed by such impulses, without rhyme or reason?

Entering the room where he stood alone, waiting for her, she stopped his words of greeting and put away unconsciously his hand. It was as though some instinct compelled her to speak and as if she had not a moment left to do it in.

"Guy, did you deceive me when you told me that—that ill of Rupert?"

The Lord of Pomeroy turned his eyes upon her. "Why do you ask that now?"

"Were I to find, later, that you had deceived me, it would be bad for us both; for you and for me," she dreamily said.

"Deceived you in what respect?"

"About Sybilla Gaunt."

"The Lords of Pomeroy disdain deceit," was his reply. "The fact of Rupert's remaining away so long might convince you that he is with *her*, or with some other equally powerful attraction, without any further proof."

"True, true," she murmured. "Forgive me, Guy."

Guy Pomeroy bent towards her, and would have sealed his forgiveness, but was met by a gesture of repression. "Don't, please," she faintly said, as she drew away.

A passing frown contracted Guy's face. When these little episodes peeped out, showing how utterly she disliked him, he felt at war with her, with Rupert, with the world, and with Heaven.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORM.

THE month by the calendar was June ; the day, in the first week of it : looking at the weather, it might have been pronounced November ; rarely, indeed, has June seen such a day. But, if the weather was bad, the inhabitants of Abbeyland were unusually active and gay ; all, their best attire donned, making the most of their holiday. Windows and casements seemed alive with heads ; groups gathered under shelter in door-ways, in the shops, and in the blacksmith's forge, all watching the road in a flutter of expectation, for Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, was to pass with his bride.

Twice already had the gazers been gratified. Once when the string of carriages, containing the bride and her friends, had gone forth to the chapel belonging to Pomeroy Abbey ; and again at the conclusion of the ceremony, when they went back to the White House to breakfast, the bride then sitting by her lord in his new and handsome chariot. A chariot emblazoned with the old arms and quarterings of the Pomeroy's, and drawn by four greys, splendidly caparisoned. A goodly sight, indeed : but what a day !

Fair and calm and lovely had the weather been throughout the past month, and when Abbeyland's inhabitants went to rest the previous evening it had appeared as settled as fair. In the morning, when they rose, the sky was of a dark leaden colour, gloomy and threatening clouds overspread the earth like a pall, and a sighing wind swept along in mourn-

ful wails, now dropping into a low dirge, now meeting, as it seemed, from all quarters, and battling in fury. No rain fell as yet, no lightning came to terrify the timid, no thunder to appal them: but if ever the elements were gathering for warfare they were that morning. And in this threatening weather the bride and her train went forth to the chapel at mid-day.

A bride bright and beautiful was she: and so she looked as she stood before the array of priests in her chaplet of white roses and orange-blossoms, the veil thrown back from her face, her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks flushed to brilliancy. A sign of happiness, quoth the company around, arrayed in their feathers and laces: they little suspected that it was but the flush of excitement; of misery if you will; or that she had disliked the Lord of Pomeroy, while she passionately loved another.

How fortunate Alice Wylde was, they deemed, to have gained that prize in the matrimonial lottery for which many had striven! And she, flighty, vain, ill-trained, worse-disciplined, disappointed in him whom she had loved, had thought she could not do better than hasten to be somebody else's wife, if only to be revenged on the false lover: and when that somebody chanced to be the Lord of Pomeroy, to be raised to whose position she might have counted the world well lost, Alice Wylde had not hesitated. Some right-minded girls might have shrunk from the indelicacy of marrying one brother when they had loved the other. Not so Alice Wylde. To be Lady of Pomeroy she would have sacrificed more than any trifling reluctance that might haunt her of that kind.

And there she knelt in the chapel by the bridegroom's side, promising to be to him ever a loving and faithful wife. The lord's sisters, Isabel, the wife of the Honourable Mr. Capel, and Joan Pomeroy, stood near her; Joan splendidly attired for once; and next to them was the bride's mother, Mrs. Wylde, resplendent in laces and satins. The greater portion of this gorgeous crowd were guests for the day only, to be entertained at the White House; where, according to popular belief, feasting was to prevail all day; and in the

evening the bride and bridegroom would take up their abode at the abbey.

That such a morning should have arisen, so unnatural in the sweet month of June, struck all with dismay. We like the sun to shine at festivals. During the ceremony in the chapel, the darkness grew deeper, a darkness rarely experienced in the daytime. His Eminence the Cardinal, who had travelled down to preside at the nuptial mass, had to rub his spectacles. The old Gothic chapel, with its narrow casements, in keeping with the Gothic abbey beside it, became so obscure that one countenance could not be distinguished from another, and when the bride was requested to write her name in this book, she objected, saying that she could not see. One of the tapers used in the ceremony was brought near, and by its light she wrote what was required of her. In this gloom, at the conclusion of the ceremony, but still in no rain, the procession took its way back to the White House, where the bridal entertainments were held.

And so the hours passed; the spectators gathered in the cottages in Abbeyland feasting a little on their own score, and gossiping away the day until the last instalment of the pageantry should pass and gladden their sight.

Evening came. And with it the jarring storm that had strangely held off so long; wind, rain, thunder, lightning: in the midst of which Guy Pomeroy must bring forth his bride to conduct her to the abbey. The Lords of Pomeroy condescended not to the wedding-tour, a fashion introduced of later years: the former lords had taken their brides straight from their maiden to their wedded home, and the modern lords disdained to adjure the custom.

"Why do they tarry?" uttered one good wife to a knot of neighbours, who had collected within her dwelling-house. It was that of Tom Whittaker, the second keeper, and just in the middle of the village. Naomi Rex, from the forest, made one of them. She had been at the abbey, and in the chapel, and had now come to Whittaker's with her niece Bridget. The old woman had white satin ribbons on her cap, and Bridget was as smart as she dare be. Bridget was outside just now, since a more extended view down the road

could be obtained there. "Half-past seven o' the clock," continued Rhode Whittaker, "and they were to have come forth on the stroke of the hour."

"Why, they tarry for the weather, to be sure," spoke her next neighbour.

"Nay, then they may put off their bridal garments, and Madam Wylde may just have 'em for the night, instead of the abbey," retorted Rhode Whittaker, who liked nothing so much as the sound of her own voice. "There's no chance that this storm will slacken; the lightning may, but the rain and the wind won't; and that the Lord of Pomeroy may see for himself."

"At three o'clock, 'twas said the banquet was to be. They have had time to eat it, and another to it: why don't they come?"

"Don't be impatient, you women," exclaimed Whittaker himself, who was standing at the open door, half in, half out. "They'll come, all in time: trust the Lord of Pomeroy for that. A bad day, sir," he added, touching his hat to some one who was passing.

"Who's that you are speaking to, Tom?" asked his wife.

"Mr. Gaunt."

"Mr. Gaunt! Why, where's he going, in all this storm?"

"To the abbey, I should say. He's taking that direction."

"Aunt Rhode," screamed out a girl of nineteen, "I wouldn't be married on such a day as this, if I had to keep single all my life. It bodes ill-luck."

"Hush-sh-sh!" came the prolonged caution from several lips. It was a bold tongue in Abbeyland that dared hint at ill-luck for a Pomeroy.

"There's nobody here but ourselves," returned the girl, in a subdued tone. "And I didn't send the storm. It's come, and there can't be harm in saying that it is. To me it seems to bode frightful luck."

"The same thing has been in my mind all day," whispered Naomi Rex, from the arm-chair near the fire. "When I got up this morning, and saw the dead, ghostly look of things—yes, you may question it, but they had a blue

ghostly look, just as they had that day last year when the heavens were darkened for the—what was it called?—the eclipse of the sun, and the cocks set on to crow at mid-day. So it has looked all day since. Thought I to myself—if ever there's ill-luck meant to be foreshadowed, it must be this day, for the Lord and new Lady of Pomeroy. As Mary Lamp says, we did not send the storm; but as it is here, I see not why it should not be spoken of—and the fear it brings to thoughtful minds."

"And I just ask you all," returned the girl, delighted at being upheld in her treason by so eminent an authority as Naomi Rex, "did you ever see such lightning, or hear such thunder? Aunt Rhode knows it, though she snubs me. Hark to that peal!"

"Yes, Mary Lamp's right—it is a storm and a day altogether out of the common," assented Naomi. "Hardly a minute of this blessed day but my silent prayers have been going up to heaven, that the ill this too surely seems to portend may be averted."

Tom Whittaker put his head as far beyond the door as it would go, to have his laugh out. He did not believe in omens.

"Strange the lord didn't bring his brother, Mr. Rupert, to the wedding," cried a woman who was mounted on a chair to see the better. "Perhaps Mr. Rupert don't care for weddings."

"He'd care for the feasting that is to come after it, though. There's to be open house at the abbey for nine days to come, and the lord and the lady are to head the tables."

"I wish Mr. Rupert had been the heir," exclaimed Mary Lamp, enthusiastically. "He's a rare brave man to speak to, with a merry eye: but the lord's as cold as a stone."

An unlucky remark: the girl was almost buffeted. The gay Rupert was not held in the favour that the lord was, for his faults were certainly not those of being cold or stony; and though the community did not praise him, it would not blame. Harsh tongues were let loose upon the girl.

"There'dst better not get within/ken o' Mr. Rupert's merry

eye, I can tell thee that, girl, or may be thee'dst find thy own the sadder for it," said an old man who sat in the opposite chair to Naomi.

The girl looked as though she would like to rebel. "I don't care," cried she: "you are all ready to lie down and let the lord step over you as he walks, but he's not half the pleasant lord that his father was, nor that Mr. Rupert would have made. I said no more than that, and where's the ill of it? T'other day he was riding out of the bean-field, none of the grooms after him, and I pulled the gate back for him and held it wide. He rode through, as stiff as a log of wood, never so much as saying thank ye, or turning his eye to see who it was holding it."

"He is the Lord of Pomeroy, and we are his vassals," replied Mrs. Whittaker: "and you had better not talk so free, Mary Lamp. They say Miss Pomeroy leaves the abbey for good when the nine days' feasting's over; she has her fortune, and can have her home where she likes."

"Nay, not for good," spoke up Naomi. "She'll be coming back again: she told me so t'other day, when we were talking of Miss Isabel. You take queer fancies in your head, Rhode Whittaker."

"I only takes the fancies that folks puts into it," resentfully retorted Mrs. Whittaker. "Holy Virgin! did you see that flash?"

"Here's something else to see," cried Whittaker, putting his head round the door-post again. "They be coming at last."

In spite of the wind and the pouring rain—in spite of the forked lightning and the resounding thunder, out went the younger women, leaving the windows for the aged. Out they pressed from all parts and from all quarters, until the road seemed lined, as by magic—to see those whom they had seen hundreds of times before.

But not in their bridal attire: and that was worn now. It had not been put off. The wreath of roses and orange-blossoms were yet on the bride's head, and the flowing veil still fell behind her; but her cheeks' crimson had gone. The Lord of Pomeroy sat by her in his towering height;

she looked as a little girl beside him; and his ever pale complexion was not a whit less ghastly than usual, and his hare-lip was only too conspicuous. But for that lip and the unnaturally white skin, he would have been a very handsome man: handsome in a degree he was now, for his features, excepting the upper lip, were perfectly formed, his grey eyes were beautiful, and his height and figure of noble presence.

"She's pale now," cried one of the women; "she don't like the storm."

"I shouldn't," put in Mary Lamp. "Is Jeffs making his horses go slow on purpose?"

"What purpose?"

"That we may see the better."

"Psha, child!" rebuked a man who was standing next her. "Don't you see that Jeffs is keeping his reins tight over 'em—pulling them in! If he let 'em get their heads, they'd be off. Look how they pant! Dumb creatures be more frightened at a storm like this than human people."

Jeffs, the coachman, sat on his box, seeming, indeed, to have as much as he could manage in the four grey horses. The Lords of Pomeroy always drove four-in-hand: they held postillions, in those days much in fashion, in supreme contempt: Jeffs did the same. The carriage had been waiting at the White House at seven o'clock; and the half-hour after it had struck before the lord and his bride came forth.

In that space of time the horses had become thoroughly frightened by the storm, almost unmanageable; and Jeffs, keeping his own place on the hammercloth, was reduced to the humiliation (very great to him) of ordering the two footmen to hold the heads of the leaders. So that this proud office, of which Jeffs had thought so much—that of driving home his lord and his new lady—had partially collapsed; the glitter and glare had been taken from it. From the time of starting from the White House, the storm seemed to grow worse with every minute, the horses to become more terrified, and Jeffs had had his hands full.

"Pray the patron saint of the Pomeroy's to keep back that

lightning, or I shan't master 'em!" ejaculated he to himself, just as they were passing the dwelling of Whittaker.

The patron saint was deaf to poor Jeffs. In the very next moment a flash came, more vivid than any preceding it. It was followed by an awful crash of thunder; the horses reared,* plunged, curvetted, and finally started away like mad. The two footmen, standing up behind in purple and silver, with their gold-headed canes, bent aside in dismay to look beyond the chariot, to see whither they might be going.

"Holy Mary, help us!" uttered Jeffs. "A pretty wedding-day this is!"

And, if they were frightened, these hardy men, what must the young bride have been? She uttered a faint scream as the horses dashed onwards, started partially up, and seized the handle of the carriage-door to open it. Guy drew her down again.

"Alice, what are you thinking of? It would be certain death."

She turned her white and terror-stricken face upon him. "Better walk to the abbey, through the storm and the rain, than be at the mercy of these wild horses."

"They are frightened, like you, my dearest. Jeffs can manage them. See; they are slackening their speed."

"We had better walk—if we could only get out! Oh, Guy, let us walk!"

He shook his head. It was a perilous situation, growing more perilous with every flash: but their best chance, indeed, their only chance, lay in keeping quiet within the closed carriage.

"Guy, what a day!" bursting into tears of present terror; whilst a vague, undefined feeling of dread pervaded her as to the future. "I wish we had put it off till to-morrow. Theresa suggested it when she saw what dreadful weather it was—but mamma laughed at her."

Guy Pomeroy did not answer. He hastily turned her face towards him, so that she could not see out, and held her there, as if caressingly. The horses were at their worst. Now galloping, now rearing, plunging, and stamping in fury, and now galloping again, on they went. Guy sat,

upright and calm, and she clung to him. The terrified footmen, putting life before etiquette, managed to get carefully down and reach terra firma. One fell as he loosed his hold, the other staggered: but they were in safety. They ran after the carriage with their sticks, just as many of the spectators, who had been standing to see it pass, were also running. Jeffs had lost all command, and the horses were as furies.

The Lord of Pomeroy put his head out at the front window, and called aloud to his trusty coachman. "Jeffs, take care: tighten the left rein, or they will pass the turning." And down he sat again, and shielded his bride's face as before. She was shivering.

"Courage, my love," he whispered: "another minute or two, and we shall be in the more sheltered drive, close to the abbey."

Jeffs was skilful and experienced, and Jeffs "took care," as his lord enjoined; but skill and care are sometimes powerless to arrest the career of animals frightened to madness. The rein was tightened in vain; the horses would not turn on their proper path, but dashed blindly forward beyond it. And those, following behind, uttered a shrill cry of despair as the horses passed it and tore onwards, for they were plunging on to a dangerous road—a road which on one side had no protection. The lord saw his danger; but he thought far less of it than of keeping its sight from her. She struggled her face free, in spite of him, and looked up.

"We are on the precipice!" she shrieked. "Oh, Guy, we are on the precipice!"

"Hush, hush, child!" he implored with strained lips. "If Jeffs can keep them on the road, we are safe; they will stop at the hill. Don't scream, Alice; it may increase their terror. I think the storm is somewhat abating."

Her voice died away, and she remained quiet as a lamb, hiding her face upon his breast, and clasping him with a tight, nervous clasp: in that strong form, although she did not love it, there seemed to be protection: but she shook so terribly, that she almost caused him to shake also; betraying how excessive was her alarm. The storm, that had seemed

to lull for a moment, raged again in its fury, and the horses raged in theirs; now kicking, now foaming, now rearing themselves upright. Jeffs was flung from the box; and, in a second more, horses, carriage, and inmates had rolled down the precipice, on to the grass.

The fall had not been more than a few feet: had the horses gone farther on, it would have been much greater, for the hill gradually ascended to a height, where it overlooked the sea. The runners, their senseless shouts having died away into horror-stricken silence, passed the dead body of Jeffs—dead it looked—and gazed over the side. Carriage and horses lay in an appalling mass; the horses plunging, one of them shrieking. Did you ever hear the shriek of a wounded and frightened horse, reader? It is not pleasant to listen to.

Gaunt, the gamekeeper, who had been near the abbey, and had rushed forward to arrest, if possible, the horses, but was not in time, came up first; he took out his knife and cut the traces. Two of the horses would never rise again; the other two dashed away in their freedom; and then the spectators climbed up and looked in at the carriage window, for the carriage was lying on its side.

"Get me out," said the Lord of Pomeroy.

He was not dead, at any rate: he was bruised and shaken, and there was a deep cut on his forehead: but his poor young bride lay senseless. "She has fainted from terror," said Guy, when she was extricated from the chariot; and he gently picked her up in his arms, her light weight being but as a feather in his great strength. So would he have borne her to the abbey.

"The lord had better not," interposed Gaunt, sensibly. "Should any bones be broken, it might do worse injury. Let a mattress be brought."

Guy Pomeroy sat down on the wet grass until the mattress should come, and held her to him. Water was fetched, and sprinkled over her face; some one suggested that her hands should be chafed; and the gloves were drawn off. Guy took the left hand in his.

"You don't rub hard enough, sir," said Gaunt. "That gentle rubbing will do no good."

"I shall hurt her hand, with these rings on it."

"Take them off, sir."

It was not bad advice. Alice was wearing three or four. Guy took them off, and dropped them into his waistcoat pocket.

But the rubbing and the water did not restore her to consciousness. The mattress was brought and she was borne to the abbey; and still she did not revive. Mr. Norris, the surgeon, entered it as they did; and he and Guy remained alone with her. She was placed upon a table, and the surgeon bent down his ear to her mouth and heart. A frightful, terrible fear, stole suddenly into Guy's breast.

"She is not dead?" he gasped, controlling his voice and face to calmness.

"Oh no, she is not dead," was Mr. Norris's reply. "But I fear there may be some slight concussion of the brain."

Meanwhile poor Jeffs had been brought into the abbey and was now seated upon a couch in the housekeeper's parlour. His temporary insensibility had soon passed away, and he had managed to walk up from the scene of the accident with the help of one of the footmen. Beyond a few bruises on the left side, the side on which he fell, and sprained wrists and an aching shoulder, Jeffs had not sustained damage. He sat there now, having been comforted with a liberal supply of some delicious cordial, and was holding forth to such of the servants as could spare time from the general confusion to gather around him. No ignominy like this had ever fallen upon Jeffs. To have been thrown from the box when he was driving the Lord and Lady of Pomeroy home on their wedding-day, so that the horses had obtained their fling and brought on the catastrophe which had ensued, would be more than sufficient humiliation for his lifetime.

"I'd not ha' minded if they'd killed me, the brutes, so that I'd brought the lord home all right first," he protested earnestly, in a voice that had a sound of tears in it. "And for two o' that matchless grey team to be done for, and me spared!"

"But doesn't your shoulder gi^ve you pain, Jeffs—and all

the rest of your injuries?" cried Bridget, who was sure to be foremost in every gathering that afforded an opportunity for gossip.

"Drat my shoulder!—and my injuries!" retorted Jeffs, with slight gallantry. "What's my injuries, put alongside o' them there two sweet greys?"

"Well, I didn't mean to offend you," said Bridget soothingly, for she was a well-meaning, good-tempered young woman, who never quarrelled with any one. "I'm sure, Jeffs, when I saw you pass with those horses all rearing and prancing, my heart was in my mouth. You were pulling at them, and no mistake."

"Pulling!—look at my sprained wrists," cried Jeffs, holding out his unfortunate hands. "Did you ever see horses in such a fright before?"

"No," said Bridget, "and I never wish to see it again. Tom Whittaker said they put him in mind of tigers."

"Tom Whittaker did, did he! What right has he to call my horses tigers?"

"Well, Jeffs, I must say you are unreasonable—after all the harm the horses have done——"

"'Twasn't their fault; 'twas the fault o' the storm," put in Jeffs.

"And I'm sure they were just as fierce as tigers," insisted Bridget, who liked to have the last word. "But there, take another sup, Jeffs, and comfort yourself; you'll be better to-morrow."

"My two greys won't be better," lamented Jeffs. "You'd not match that team in all the county for perfection and beauty. And for two of 'em to come to this untimely end! It will be a'most the end of me."

"It's Aunt Naomi that's concerned," resumed the young woman. "She has been all day in the queerest state you ever saw, Jeffs—and I left her sitting in Whittaker's hearth-corner, taking no notice of anybody. The weather upset her spirits, she says, and she thinks it bad for it to have come on the wedding-day."

"Bad!" echoed Jeffs. "It's worse than bad; it's atrocious. And if the wind had a neck of its own, he'd

deserve to have it wrung for him. But nobody knows where the wind comes from, nor what it is; so he can't be got at."

"Now, Jeffs, how can you be so profane!" reproved Bridget, passing over the confusion shown by the personal pronouns.

"A blowing, and a roaring, and a driving round 'em like mad, it was. It all but whistled my state cocked-hat off. A fine coming home this has been!"

Mr. Norris had good cause to remain with the Lady of Pomeroy. They could not restore her to consciousness. Throughout the whole night she did not revive; as the hours struck, one hour succeeding the other, each found her in the same state. The doctor and the attendants waited round her bed, and Guy paced the rooms of the abbey, one room after another; now stealing into the chamber and gazing on her, and now departing on his restless walk again.

And that was the ending of the Lord of Pomeroy's wedding-day.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE YOUNG LADY OF POMEROY.

A CONCUSSION of the brain it had proved to be, but not a dangerous one. Sooner than might have been expected, Mrs. Pomeroy grew better, was herself again, and progressing towards recovery.

The news of the accident had caused a great deal of stir and commotion in the county; and the festivities that would have taken place at the abbey were postponed. The guests that were to fill it, and who had been bidden to it for the day following the marriage, that being the Pomeroy custom, had notice sent to them to prevent their starting. Mrs.

Capel, with her husband, went to visit some friends in the neighbourhood.

Cautious nurses were Mrs. Wylde and Joan; could attention have cured Alice, she had been well forthwith. Guy had been excluded from the room. Guy rebelled: he thought he could make as good a nurse as the best of them: but he was assured that her life depended upon her enjoying perfect tranquillity; and with such a stake in hand, Guy would have kept out of her sight for a twelvemonth. Neither would they allow Alice to speak, until she grew so much better that she would be quiet no longer.

"How long have I lain here?" at length asked she of Mrs. Wylde.

"Eight days, my dear."

"This is a strange room. Is it the abbey?"

"Of course it is. It is your own room in it."

"I was married, was I not?" continued Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Why, don't you remember?" returned her mother.

"Yes, I remember. I lay and thought things over yesterday, when you would not let me talk: and I remember the awful day—and oh, mother," shuddering, "I remember the drive home! I remember the furious horses, and Guy holding me. Did we fall over the precipice?"

"Only at the commencement of it. The accident was a sad one," added Mrs. Wylde, "but do not recur to it now, Alice; no lives were lost. Jeffs was thought to be badly hurt at the time; but he is better. Quite well, indeed."

Mrs. Pomeroy raised herself in bed, sitting up and looking eagerly at her mother. "Did it kill Guy?" she asked, in a whisper.

"Good gracious, no, child! Don't frighten yourself with these imaginative fancies. Lie down. The Lord of Pomeroy was not hurt to speak of." Had it been to save her credit, Mrs. Wylde could not have helped giving Guy this title upon every possible occasion: the charm it bore for her ears was beyond expression. She could never bring herself to call him Mr. Pomeroy; but that is what he was, in spite of the title that was personally accorded him. Alice resumed.

"Oh—then—Guy is well!"

"Quite well, Alice. Your beautiful dress is the worst off."

"How so?"

"After the carriage was overturned, whilst your husband held you, the skirts of your white dress lay in the wet and muddy grass: I will leave you to judge of the state it was in: though, indeed, I took only one glimpse at it. And the wreath was crushed, and the veil torn. Now don't talk any more."

There ensued a few minutes' pause, and then the invalid began again. Her hands were raised before her, and she appeared to be looking at them. "If I am married, where's my wedding-ring?"

"Now, Alice, how can you talk so nonsensically? 'If I am married!' You must be assuming this forgetfulness. Don't you remember all about it?"

"I suppose I do," sighed Alice.

"Then why need you pretend not to do so?"

"Well, where is my wedding-ring?"

"The Lord of Pomeroy has it."

"Did Guy——"

"I will not have you talk any more," peremptorily interrupted Mrs. Wylde. "This is the first day you have been allowed to speak, and you are talking as if you were doing it for a wager. Wait until you are stronger."

As the most effectual way of carrying out her mandate, Mrs. Wylde quitted the room, leaving Alice alone. Compelled to silence, she lay and thought; her mind was very busy. By-and-by Miss Pomeroy entered.

"Joan, come here," she said; "sit down on the bed close to me. What a shocking accident this has been!"

"It has," replied Joan, not taking the place indicated, but drawing a chair forward. "But you are getting better, therefore——"

"Joan, I want to ask you something—and now answer me in truth; what you think, and whether I am not right. It was an awful day: such a day, I should think, as has never been known, here or elsewhere; and it was an awful accident: and the days preceding it were calm and beautiful, and I dare say the days following it have been so. Have they?"

"Yes," replied Joan, unsuspecting of her young sister-in-law's drift. "The day following the accident rose bright and lovely as the days before it had been; showing no trace, save in the wet ground and the damaged crops, of the angry day that had intervened."

"Well, now, Joan, should you not say that it was an omen of evil to me and Guy?"

Joan would not answer: she would not refute the notion, for she disdained equivocation. Given to superstition, as were all the Pomeroyes—the very abbey itself, with its tales and its gloom, was enough to imbue them with it—she had been deducing evil augury to her brother and his wife from the strange day and the accident it had led to; but she had kept the feeling within her own breast. Others were not so silent; and Guy had been nearly driven demented by the evil prognostications whispered around him.

"You don't speak, Joan: you will not speak: and I know what that means. Here's mamma again," she broke off, as Mrs. Wylde entered.

"Alice, the Lord of Pomeroy is coming in to pay you a visit." Alice rose up in her bed, startled; and looked at her mother.

"The Lord of Pomeroy! Here!"

"Yes. He is waiting now. He waylaid me in the corridor to say so."

Young Mrs. Pomeroy turned crimson to the roots of her hair. "I cannot see him here; in bed! He must wait until I am up and in my dressing-room; that will be in a day or two."

"Nonsense," returned Mrs. Wylde. "He is your husband, remember. We will dress you up in a shawl and a pretty cap for the visit. Don't be fastidious."

"I won't see him, then," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"How very ridiculous! he will not eat you. Why, he wanted to make one of your nurses, Alice."

Mrs. Pomeroy looked red and very indignant. "I am astonished at you, mamma!"

"I am astonished at you," returned Mrs. Wylde. "Had this accident happened before you were married, there would

have been no impropriety, even then, in his seeing you; and so every one would say who has any pretensions to a grain of common sense: but under existing circumstances he has a *right* to see you, and he will exercise it. I can tell you, Alice, he is not pleased at having been kept out of your room, like a stranger; it has tried his temper and his feelings; but so much was said about your not being excited, that he yielded, and contented himself with taking a peep at you through the open door now and then."

"It is unreasonable," pouted Alice.

"*You must be unreasonable yourself to say so,*" retorted Mrs. Wylde. "But I will leave your husband to settle that. To tell you the truth, I knew he was coming in to-day, and that's why I did not want you to fatigue yourself with talking beforehand."

Alice looked round at Joan. She was standing with compressed lips and severe expression: displeased, at least so Alice interpreted it, to hear this objection raised to a simple and, what might be called, a ceremonious visit. Guy determined, her mother determined, and Joan angry!—Alice began to think she might as well give in.

The Lord of Pomeroy entered; Mrs. Wylde and Joan retired and closed the door upon him. Alice lay, well covered up; her pretty face in its pretty cap nearly buried in the pillow. Guy bent down to kiss her—which was very natural.

"Oh, don't, please," cried Alice, putting him back with her hand, and turning her face away; "my head is not strong yet, and must not be touched." But the Lord of Pomeroy was her husband now, and chose to judge for himself: and he turned her face back again, and took the kiss; took another and another, but in all gentleness. He would be far more careful of her than she was of herself. Then he sat down, spoke a little of the intense anxiety her illness had caused him, and of his deep gratitude to Him, who is the giver of all good, for her recovery, so far. In these quiet moments, all the gentleness in his nature in full exercise, none could help liking the Lord of Pomeroy.

Alice heard him pretty patiently. But he had hardly finished when she began to speak somewhat eagerly.

"Guy."

"What, my dearest?"

"I want you to listen to me; I am going to say something that I have been thinking of yesterday and to-day. I never was superstitious, Guy; but it is impossible to look upon what has happened without some such feeling intruding upon me."

"The accident will have no lasting consequences," interrupted Guy Pomeroy, possibly doomed, as it appeared, to hear reiterated by his bride the same song he had been obliged to hear from others.

"The accident was awful," she rejoined, with a shudder. "Oh, Guy! I never shall forget the terror I felt at the snorting and flying horses. How could you maintain your presence of mind?"

"I had you with me."

"I look not so much at the accident itself, as at the strange, wild day," she resumed. "The weather has never been like that. We have had summer storms, terrific storms, fatal to property and to life, but they have come on naturally, Guy, and have cleared again after they had spent themselves. But that strange day was unnatural."

"It was uncommon," said the Lord of Pomeroy.

"Guy, it was unnatural. It seemed to be sent as a warning to us. To us."

"A warning to us?"

"Yes. Not to enter into our union: the very heavens lowered their displeasure upon it."

"Alice!" returned the lord, in a tone of vexation and rebuke. "Who has been putting these notions into your head?"

"Not any one," she answered. "Mamma and Joan have kept me silent, not allowing me to speak, or speaking to me. I could not close my eyes to the weather, Guy. I told Joan, just now, that it was a bad omen for you and for me. She would not answer me."

"Joan was right."

"Perhaps so—but I know what she thinks. You are a man, Guy, and therefore will pretend to despise these fears;

perhaps you do despise them : but, rely upon it, that strange day was sent to portend ill to us, if ever ill was portended yet."

"Then, my dear, we will ward off the ill together. I will ward all ill from you, Heaven helping me."

"We can ward it off in one way," said Alice : "it is the only way left to us."

"Well?" returned Guy, smiling.

"By never being more to each other than we are now," she whispered : "by getting the marriage annulled."

"What!" uttered Guy, a frown of mingled pain and astonishment displacing the smile upon his face.

"It could be done, Guy. And then we may laugh at the past storm, and have no fears for the future."

"Your head must be still light from fever, Alice!"

She put out her left hand and clasped his arm. "Do not let us tempt Fate, Guy. That day was surely an omen of ill upon our union; as surely as anything can be an omen in this world. And in what other light could the accident to me be regarded, but as an awful veto upon my entering the abbey as its mistress?"

Guy was holding her hand between his, playing with her fingers. "It should have come sooner, then, if that was its intention," said he, gaily. "Do you see this?"

He held up her hand, so that she might look at it : he had slipped on her wedding-ring. Alice strove to draw her hand away.

"Had Fate—as you call it—wished to interpose her veto upon your entering the abbey, she should have been rather more prompt, and not have waited until you were my wife."

"To treat it in that mocking way, Guy, is—wicked."

"Nay, my dear, I say nothing but the truth. If Fate, human or hobgoblin, owed us a grudge, and set herself to scowl upon our marriage, she should not have been quite so dilatory. The interposition should have come before you quitted your mother's house and your mother's name."

"It is not too late, Guy : it may be managed. When I am well enough to be moved, I can go back home with my mother."

Guy did his best to keep his anger within bounds. "Alice, you talk like a child. After having married me, come home to me, stopped with me, you think you could go back from it all, and become Alice Wylde again! What would the world say of you? Nothing laudable, I ween."

"You are cruel," was her tearful response. "I thought the Lord of Pomeroy deemed himself a gentleman."

"I hope he is one. But he is your husband."

"My days will be a long dread of undefined fear," she continued in agitation. "Let the world say what it will, I shall leave the abbey as I came into it."

"For shame, Alice!" Guy's temper was rising.

"The marriage can be easily broken," she persisted, "for the Pomeroy influence is great in Rome: and you know, Guy, my heart never was in it. You shall wed a better wife, and I will be Alice Wylde again."

One of the haughty Pomeroy scowls came over the lord's face. "That you may seek, and wed, the renegade Rupert—who won your heart with his false vows, and carried its tales of credulity to amuse his real idol! who—who——"

Guy paused: his anger had overmastered him, but his senses were returning: in a calmer moment he would have bitten his tongue out, rather than have so taunted her, now she was his wife. He had never thought to speak the name of Rupert to her again: he wished it to be equally shunned by the one as by the other.

"You are generous!" she returned, speaking with scorn to keep down the tears. "Were I free as air, and Rupert Pomeroy came to me in his soul's repentance, pleading for love and pardon, I would trample him under foot, rather than listen to him. Had I a hope now to give to Rupert I should never have consented to marry you."

The Lord of Pomeroy rose; his passion had changed to calmness. "I beg your pardon," he softly whispered: "in this interview we have each something to forgive the other. You should not so have spoken, Alice: my wife you have been made by your own vows, and my wife you are. Any one less ignorant of the ways of the world than you are, would never have thought of such a thing as parting now."

She burst into tears. "I am sure they all think we shall have a dreadful fate."

"Child, do not speak so! Not if I can shield you from it."

"Ask Joan. And Theresa comes in with a face as gloomy as an owl's."

"Laugh at them. I certainly should have thought, Alice, that you were above any such superstition. Dry your tears."

"This excitement may make me worse again, Guy."

"I should grieve for that. I am going, and I will send your mother to you. But when I come in again, my dearest, meet me as a friend; not as a foe."

He bent down and kissed her face, as he had done at entering, and quitted the room. Mrs. Wylde came into it, but Alice motioned her away, and said she would sleep: so she was left alone.

Droll sleep it was: a prolonged fit of sobbing and tears. But Guy had left upon her hand the wedding-ring: a sure earnest that she could not go from him.

Mrs. Wylde caught just the two first syllables of the word separation, and seriously believed her brain must be affected; she told her she deserved a good shaking—for even imagining so great a scandal. Let her say it again, and she and Miss Pomeroy would quit the abbey, leaving no one to nurse her but Guy. It appeared that Alice had no choice left her.

But, ignorant though Alice might be in the world's ways, as her husband had just assumed, she was quite an adept in many little petty wiles and ruses: and she contrived to spin out the "getting well" to a period that Guy thought interminable. At length, Mrs. Wylde quitted the abbey, leaving a good private scolding for Alice behind her. Joan Pomeroy went to join her sister, Mrs. Chapel, on the visit the latter was paying—both of them to return to the abbey in a few days; and Alice, fully restored to health, even in her own estimation, assumed her proper station as the abbey's mistress.

And then Guy filled it with the guests that had been waiting to come ever since the wedding. Feasting was the

order of the day: gaiety reigned; dinners, drives, dressing, and vanity. In the midst of this, all so dear to her pleasure-loving heart, Alice was forgetting her fears of evil; and if she was not precisely in the seventh heaven of happiness as the wife of Guy, she was certainly not by any means miserable. She loved gaiety; and the deference paid to her, both as a bride and as the Lady of Pomeroy, turned her head with pleasure. The women envied, the men admired, Guy loved; and Alice Pomeroy's life was as a dream of indulged vanity.

"Which is best, Alice," Guy said to her one day, laughingly, "to reign here as mistress and my idolized wife, or to have gone back home again to be Alice Wylde?"

"I was ill and weak, dear Guy," she pleaded, "and the storm had frightened me. I am glad to be here."

"You shall always be glad, my dearest, if it depend on me," whispered Guy. And Alice turned to him with a loving look and a loving word. She had resolutely disciplined herself to overcome the distaste she felt for him, and she was succeeding.

"Joan," spoke the Honourable Mrs. Capel, one day when the two sisters were together in the garden, "I do not like our new sister-in-law."

"No?" said Joan.

"Not at all. Do you?"

The question was pointedly put. In her heart of hearts, Joan did not like Alice Pomeroy, had never been able, in spite of her efforts, to bring herself to like her when she was Alice Wylde. But Joan was all for peace, for making the best of things, and therefore felt very unwilling to confess as much, even in confidence.

"And I wonder at Guy's infatuation," added Mrs. Capel.

"Do you, Isabel? Alice is very pretty."

"Pretty!" cried Mrs. Capel, slightly tossing her head. "What of that? So are other people."

Possibly by "other people" she meant herself. Certainly the two sisters presented a contrast. Isabel lively and beautiful; Joan grave, stern-featured, and too tall for a woman. The one liked dress; the other avoided it. Look

at them to-day: Isabel wears a delicate silk that gleams and changes in the sun; Joan has on some delectable thick dull material of the sober colour she favours—dark purple.

"Guy might have chosen as pretty a girl as she is; aye, and prettier," continued Mrs. Capel. "For my part, I don't think she is so very pretty; I don't very much like her face. But I suppose her fortune tempted him."

"Her fortune is of course a good thing. But I am sure of this much, Isabel: that had she not possessed a penny in the world, Guy would still have married her."

"In his infatuation, I dare say he would. When once a man loves in the impassioned manner that Guy too evidently loves, he rarely takes expediency into consideration."

"Why do you not like her, Isabel?"

"Because I don't," laughed Mrs. Capel. "If that's not a sufficient reason, Joan, I hardly know that I can give you another. There's something about her that jars upon me: something that tells me she is not truthful: and certainly she is not a lady at heart. Do you remember that little girl who used to come here from the convent, Joan?"

"Which little girl? Several have come here."

"Rosa Peters. Well, she had no beauty, had she?—but she had a gentle, genuine, honest face, the reflection of a true and guileless heart. I should have liked Guy to choose her: and at one time I thought he seemed inclined to do so."

"*Did* you think so?" cried Joan in surprise. "Rely upon it Guy never thought of her in that way. I don't believe he has ever given a thought to any one except Alice Wylde. Rosa Peters was a very nice girl; we rarely see one so charming. Yes, I wish she could have been Guy's wife. But, Isabel——"

"Well?"

"Alice is his wife: and though we may not like her as well as we could wish, only one thing remains—to make the best of it."

"Quite right—especially for you, who will see more of her than I shall. My dear Joan, had he married an Indian you would have said, 'Make the best of it.'"

"I dare say we shall like her in time, when she has shaken down into her place, and——"

"Assumes less, you would say. Is that a right word? Any way, you know what I mean. She is eaten up with vanity: as her mother is with pretension. I don't believe the woman has ever before mixed with decent people. But you need not knit your brow, Joan: all the talking in the world will not undo the marriage, so we will just leave it. Guy has chosen this girl with his eyes open; and I hope with all my heart that she will make him happy. Do you know whom I met this morning?"

"No."

"Gaunt. In coming home from matins, I walked round the keep, taking a look at the old place, and Gaunt was crossing the field on the other side. It is the first time I have seen him since I came here."

"Did you speak to him? Did you ask about Sybilla?"

"I spoke of course. I did not like to ask about her. But now, Joan, where is Sybilla?"

Miss Pomeroy shook her head. She wished she knew.

"Can it be true that she lost her head?"

"Yes. Unfortunately."

"Well, I don't believe it."

"Not believe it?"

"No; I cannot believe it of Sybilla Gaunt. I don't think the Lady Abbess believes it. Or Sister Mildred, either. When I was at the convent yesterday, I spoke of her."

"And what did they say?"

"Nothing. They would not speak of her at all. But when I said I could not and would not believe the dreadful ill that was reported of her, they both looked as if they approved my words."

"Yes, in their charity," said Joan, in low tones. "*There is no room for doubt*, Isabel; I tell it you; and I would almost as soon have had to tell it of myself."

"Where's Rupert?" resumed Mrs. Capel sharply.

"In London—and in some trouble, I fear."

"Debt, of course. It will always be so with Rupert. But—is it true that he and Sybilla left together?"

"No, that's not true. About the time that Sybilla left, Rupert went somewhere, and was absent for a day or two; but he came back again."

"For a short time only, though. What does Guy say to it all?"

"Nothing. He will not allow the subject to be mentioned. I can see that, for some cause or other, his heart is waging war with Rupert."

"I have no patience with Rupert. He is too thoughtless; he does not care what scrapes he gets himself or others into."

Joan sighed. They had wandered to the edge of the lake, and Mrs. Capel was tossing crumbs of biscuit to the swans. "Have you heard lately from India—from George?" she asked.

"Not very lately," replied Joan. "George was never a good correspondent. I wish his regiment had not been ordered to India! I wish he could have been here at the wedding! Leolin could not come either. It did not seem right for the Lord of Pomeroy to be unattended by any of his brothers."

"Dear George! I should so much like to see him once again! He is the best of them all, Joan."

Joan did not answer. She loved her brother George dearly, and was grieved that he should have gone away, perhaps for years. Her eyes had a far-off look in them, as they gazed at the narrow strip of blue sky seen above the high enclosing walls of the shrubbery, to which they had walked back, just as though she could see India up there.

"Guy is cold and domineering, Rupert fonder of the world than of home, Leolin just the least bit in the world selfish," went on Mrs. Capel, summing up the virtues of her brothers; "but George is good and winning. And yet he is the one that must go from us to a distant land."

"It is ever thus, I think," said Joan. "Any pleasure we particularly wish for in this life is sure to be marred. George is the one brother we would have kept near us, and therefore George is the one to go away."

On this same morning, it chanced that Alice Pomeroy

with two of her younger guests was in her own special sitting-room; one that Guy had re-decorated so charmingly for his expected bride. Alice had informed him she did not like dull and gloomy rooms; so, to please her, he had made this into a modern one. It was wonderfully pretty, no doubt; with its pink silk hangings, its mirrors and its nick-nack; and it pleased Alice's eye: but it was sadly out of keeping with the grand and sombre old abbey.

Lady Lucy Hetley, a pretty girl, daughter of the Earl of Essington, sat on the music-stool, talking and playing by turns; Miss Peters (she was cousin to the Rosa Peters mentioned by Mrs. Capel) was standing at the window, some embroidery in her hand; and Alice lay back at ease in a luxurious arm-chair, slightly swaying one foot about and doing nothing.

"And what became of the pattern?" asked Lady Lucy of Mary Peters, who was telling a tale of her convent life.

"We never knew what became of it," was the answer. "It disappeared, and that was all that could be said. Sister Mildred thought it so suspicious that she felt compelled to carry the matter to the Lady Abbess. The good mother came into the recreation-room and searched about for it herself."

"Suspicious in what way?" questioned Alice.

"Well, she thought one or other of the girls must have hidden the pattern to avoid doing the work. Eight of us were put to the task. It was the most elaborate lace pattern I ever saw; quite half-a-yard in depth, and would have taken us some months to finish."

Alice laughed. "And so one of you grew afraid of the work and hid the pattern! I think I should have done so myself. Were you the culprit, Mary?"

"I!" cried Miss Peters, lifting her frank eyes in surprise. "I would not do such a thing for the world. I was longing to begin the work: there is nothing I like doing so much as fine lace work."

"I began a piece once," said Lucy Hetley, "but never came to the end of it. I think all fine work tedious—and it ruins one's eyesight."

"Not when the eyes are young," dissented Mary Peters. "Well, the trick did not serve us—if it was a trick—for the nuns produced a more intricate pattern even than the first; and we worked it. The Lady Abbess, who is always so good and kind, thought that the one might have been torn up inadvertently by the lay-sister who was in charge of the room that week."

"What was the dress for? The chapel?"

"No, Lucy; not for the chapel. It was for Charlotte Hornyaacke's wedding-dress. She was a great favourite at the convent. When we heard, soon after she left it, that she was engaged to be married, the nuns thought that they should like to make her some useful present—for the Hornyaackes are not rich, you know; and they decided upon a lace dress for the wedding. At first the Sisters meant to work it themselves, but a few of us begged that we might do it: so they worked the veil."

"How did the dress look?"

"Oh, lovely. It was the most beautiful dress of the kind I ever saw. What was your wedding-dress?" added Lucy, turning to Alice. For neither of these young ladies had been present at the ceremony: indeed, Lucy Hetley had only now been brought by some friends for a day or two.

"Mine? Oh, mine was rich white silk with lace and flowers."

"Why don't you show it to us, Mrs. Pomeroy?"

"I will do so if you like. Come into my dressing-room," added Alice; and they all went to it together.

"I suppose it must be somewhere here," remarked Alice, opening drawers and wardrobes; "but I declare I have never thought of the dress since my wedding-day. I fancy mamma said something about its having been injured by the wet."

"No wonder you have not thought of it—with such a termination to the day," said Mary Peters. "I think I should have died of fright in the carriage."

"Oh, you can't imagine what it was!" returned Alice, slightly shuddering. "What with the dreadful storm and the furious horses, I don't know how I lived through it,

But for Guy I should have jumped out of the carriage. I have often wondered since that he could have been so calm himself."

"Was he calm?"

"Perfectly so. I asked him one day how he could have maintained it in so dreadful a scene, and he said it was because he had me with him. But now—where can my dress be? I must ring for Theresa."

Theresa came in, quiet-looking as usual, in her close cap and neat grey gown. When she was asked about the wedding-dress, she seemed to be in almost as great a puzzle as her mistress.

"I'm sure, madam, I don't know where it can be," she said, looking round in reflection. "It must have been removed after you were brought in, but I really do not know what was done with it."

"Then you ought to know," cried Alice, in her quick way.

"I did not help to take it off, I was downstairs getting things ready," pleaded Theresa. "I don't think I saw the dress, or remembered to ask about it. We were all in so much concern about you, madam, that perhaps my forgetfulness was excusable. I'll inquire of Mrs. Rex."

"Yes. Mrs. Rex knew. Mrs. Rex had helped Mr. Norris and the lord to remove the dress, and then had, herself, hung it up in the large wardrobe closet near the end of the wing. At this news, away went the three young ladies to the closet, and Mrs. Pomeroy threw open the door.

It was hanging just in front of them as they entered; the once beautiful dress of rich white silk, with its costly white lace flounces, now shrunken, muddy, and yellow, with the wet and dirt. The three ladies stood contemplating it with dismayed faces.

"What a sad pity!" breathed Miss Peters.

"But the flounces do not seem torn; at least, they are not so on this side," observed Lady Lucy. "They might be restored."

She turned the skirt slightly, and bent forward to examine it further. Something must have startled her, for she dropped it suddenly and drew back with a faint scream.

"It is covered with blood," she shuddered, turning her pale face towards Mrs. Pomeroy.

"With blood!"

"A long stream all down it. I—I don't like to see blood."

Curiosity, even for unpleasant sights, is irrepressible, and both Mrs. Pomeroy and Mary Peters pressed forward. It was as Lucy Hetley said: a long, dark, ugly stain. They shut the closet-door in trepidation, almost as though they were shutting in a ghost, turned the key, and hastened back to the dressing-room.

"I can't account for it; I don't know what should bring that mark there; I cannot understand it at all," spoke Alice Pomeroy from the low chair on which she had sunk down.

"You must have been wounded."

"But I was not wounded. Nothing was hurt but my head, and that did not bleed. It must have come on to the dress in the closet."

This sounded so ghostly a suggestion, carrying them back to the times of Mrs. Radcliffe and all sorts of unearthly thoughts, that the young ladies drew closely together, although it was broad daylight.

"I should burn it," cried Lucy Hetley. "I should think it ominous to see that stain on my wedding-dress."

What with facts and suggestions, the young Lady of Pomeroy was feeling somewhat uncomfortable. Whilst her mother was of a practical, unimaginative nature, she was the opposite: dormant in her heart lay the seeds of a superstition that might in time become formidable.

"Do you know anything about the stain on my dress, Theresa?" she lifted her head to ask.

"No, madam. When they carried you in, you were covered with the red silk counterpane that had been taken out with the mattress."

Mrs. Pomeroy impulsively went off in search of her husband. He was alone in the library writing a letter. Alice stood behind his chair, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Guy, how did that—that frightful stain come upon my bridal dress? Do you know?"

Guy laid down his pen, and drew the hand to him with a caressing movement. "What stain, my darling?"

"Of blood," she whispered. "A long, frightful stain all down it. The dress is quite spoiled."

"Won't it wash?"

"Wash!" she exclaimed, amazed at the ignorance of mankind. "But we can't think how it came there, Guy. I was not wounded."

"I was," replied Guy. He pushed aside the hair from his right temple and exhibited a mark that he would retain for life.

"That is where it came from, Alice. As I held you on the bank, the blood ran down upon your dress without my observing it."

She gave a sigh of relief. "Oh yes, that's how it was, then. We have been thinking it must have got on mysteriously in the closet. Such things have been heard of, you know, Guy. The old story-books are full of them."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Guy, laughing. "Never mind your spoiled dress, love: we will buy you another."

"Ah, Guy—you cannot buy me another wedding-dress," she answered, a strange mournfulness in her tone. "It is a great pity that that stain should have come upon it: and—and all things together seem to point to ill-luck."

"You foolish girl: you silly child," he fondly uttered. "My coat came off the worst. As to ill-luck—you are a Pomeroy now. And ill-luck is a thing we Pomeroyes never think about."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PREDICTION.

THE marriage festivities came to an end; the guests departed, and Pomeroy Abbey returned to its usual state of quietude. Joan Pomeroy had accompanied Mrs. Capel to her home; and the young Lady of Pomeroy was alone.

She did not like to be alone. She liked show and state and glitter and excitement. The abbey had been filled with these desirable acquisitions when she married Guy Pomeroy: in fact, it may with justice be said that she married him to obtain them. It was all very well to be Lady of Pomeroy; to be conscious that she filled that exalted position in the county; very gratifying to her vain heart; but she craved for something more.

According to the programme laid down before the marriage, Guy was to have taken his wife to town, when the festivities were over, that she might be presented at a drawing-room to be held late in June. How eagerly Alice Wylde had anticipated this, how covetously she had looked forward to it, she alone knew. To be presented at court seemed to her to be one of the few great and hitherto unattainable ends of this life; for we are writing of many years ago, when it was not the custom for every Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brown to intrude themselves there. Of all the honours she expected to come into by her marriage with the Lord of Pomeroy, that was looked upon as the greatest; and it was the one she most ardently longed for.

But see how fate and fortune cheat us! Anything so intensely desired as Alice desired that, is, all too often, never realized. In this case it was frustrated by the illness arising from the accident on the wedding-day. Long before the guests had come and gone after her recovery, the Queen's drawing-rooms were over. Alice would fain have gone to London all the same; but Guy laughed at her: his wife could not make her appearance there at the end of the

season, he said; and when half the world had already left it. And so, Alice perforce remained where she was, and made the best of Pomeroy Abbey. But, as day succeeded to day, week to week, and month to month, she grew to think it insufferably dull.

Take to-day as a specimen. It is a gloomy day late in November, just on a par with the gloomy abbey itself, and Alice feels bored to death. Guy went out shooting with early morning; he may come in to luncheon, or he may not; it is very uncertain; and Alice sits at the window and looks out on the dreary landscape—dreary it ever seems to her. She is dressed to perfection: a gown of soft grey cashmere, trimmed very much with pink silk, and a coquettish cap of pink ribbon and white lace upon her pretty hair. But of what use dressing to perfection when no admiring eyes are near to see it? The question rings through Alice's thoughts only too often. She is not reading; she is not working. The latter she detests; the former also—unless, indeed, it be an especially foolish novel, such as a mind of ordinary intellect can scarcely tolerate. In dressing, flirting, and rapid speech she was an adept; but these will not carry a woman happily through life. Alice's intellect was, in truth, not of the highest order: but Guy had not yet found it out. That he would discover it in time was to be supposed; for he was clever himself, and she could never be a companion to him. Now and then he did already think her rather silly.

"Why can't they address me as Lady Pomeroy?" she asked him one day in fractious tones, upon receiving a note whose superscription did not please her.

"Because you are not Lady Pomeroy, Alice. You are Mrs. Pomeroy."

"You are addressed as the Lord of Pomeroy?"

"I am generally so addressed in writing. You may be addressed as the Lady of Pomeroy, or as Mrs. Pomeroy—as people please."

"I don't like to be addressed as Mrs. Pomeroy," pouted Alice. "I ought to be Lady Pomeroy."

"Don't be silly, child," said Guy, slightly knitting his

brow. "The title is accorded to me in courtesy and from long-established usage; the habit of past generations; it confers no distinction on those connected with me."

This was not a solitary instance of her childish folly—but others need not be recorded. And we return to Alice, seated in her drawing-room on the dark November day.

"Oh dear!" she cried, with a prolonged yawn, "how dull everything is!"

Mrs. Pomeroy was not feeling well, or fancied so, which tended to increase her lassitude. Only yesterday she complained to her mother, who told her she must be patient. But there sits Alice to-day, feeling out of sorts, dreary, and with nothing in the world to do.

"Theresa," she called out, as a footstep passed the half-opened door.

But it was the housekeeper who looked in. It is not Theresa," Mrs. Rex said. "Does madam require anything that I can do for her?"

"Where is Theresa?"

"She is gone over to the White House, madam."

"What a long time she stays there! She ought to have been back ever so long ago. No, I don't want anything. Send Theresa in when she does come."

Mrs. Rex met Theresa in the corridor. "Your lady is asking for you," she said to her. "Go in at once, for she seems impatient."

"My lady always is impatient now," thought Theresa. "I suppose I may take off my bonnet first."

"Well, what news have you brought?" began Alice sharply, as the maid appeared. "How is mamma?"

"She is quite well, madam, and sends her love to you. As to news, I have not brought any."

"Did you bring the bracelet?"

"No, madam, and they can't find it anywhere. Mrs. Wylde thinks you must have dropped it in getting into the carriage, or on getting out of it. She says she saw it on your arm when the lord was putting on your opera cloak in the hall."

The previous evening Alice and Guy had dined with

Mrs. Wylde. After returning home, when undressing, Alice missed one of her bracelets. In was a band of filigree gold, the clasp set with pearls. After breakfast this morning, she had despatched Theresa to the White House, believing she must have left it there.

"Mamma says she saw it on my arm when my cloak was being put on? No doubt I dropped it in the hall. I dare say they have not half looked for it."

"Indeed, my lady, we looked well; searched every crick and corner. The lord said just now——"

"Have you seen the lord?" interrupted Alice.

"He was crossing the upper field with Mr. Gaunt and the two keepers as I left the White House," explained Theresa. "I told him that the bracelet was not found, and he said it had occurred to his memory that, in coming home last night, you put your arm out of the carriage window to feel whether it still rained. He thinks it may have dropped off then."

"Did I?" said Alice; "I'm sure I forget. If it dropped off then, some thief may have picked it up."

"And the lord desired me to say that he should not be in to luncheon, madam," added Theresa, as she withdrew. "They were going to beat some of the upper covers."

The Lady of Pomeroy sat on again, yawning and sighing and looking at the dreary landscape till luncheon time. That meal, sat down to partly for form's sake, for her appetite was not as good as it used to be, she returned to her place in the morning-room, and yawned through the afternoon, racked with ennui, at the want of something to do. She had no resources within herself; and seemed to have no object to live for.

Towards dusk the lost bracelet was brought in. One of the village labourers, going forth in the morning to his day's work, had picked it up in the highway: dropped there no doubt when she had put her arm out of the carriage the previous evening.

And thus the time, the days and the weeks, interspersed with a little receiving and visiting, contrived to pass for Mrs. Pomeroy. The visiting might have been more exten-

sive, but that somehow or other she was not so popular as she might have been. Whether it was that the old county families resented her want of birth, and regarded her as somewhat of an interloper; or whether it was *herself* that they did not like, certain it was, that Alice was less courted than the Lord of Pomeroy's wife might have expected as a right.

The winter passed, spring followed, and summer came round again. There is little to record that could interest the reader. Joan had continued with her sister Isabel.

Once more a grievous disappointment fell on Alice Pomeroy. The delicate health, hinted at, had increased; to so great a degree that her intention of going to London, for her presentation in the spring, was utterly out of the question, and had again to be postponed. Visiting abroad and entertaining guests at home had to be given up by her, for she could do nothing but nurse herself and her sickness. But Guy was in a wondrous flow of spirits, for there was expected an heir to Pomeroy. Thus the anniversary of their wedding-day came round again.

One evening soon after this, when Guy was dining out, Alice, after her own dinner, went into the oak-room, which faced the quadrangle. The sun was setting in a sky of crimson and gold: Alice could see the brightness over the opposite side of the abbey—the haunted west wing. Mrs. Pomeroy's thoughts wandered to the vast extent of the abbey—what an army of servants it must have taken to fill it when fully inhabited in the days gone by! She remembered a boast she had once made—that, should she ever be the abbey's mistress, she would cause it to be renovated, so that the county should not know it again. Opposite to her lay the west wing and tower, with whose rooms superstition made itself so busy. Those rooms she had never seen. A sudden inclination came over her to look at them now, this very evening. More than once she had asked Guy to take her over those rooms; he always answered that he would do so on the first convenient opportunity—but somehow the opportunity had never come. One grave request he had

made to her; nay, it was a command—that *she would not attempt to go up without him*. This came into her mind now.

“As if it could matter,” decided Alice at last, after pondering the matter for a few minutes. “Guy’s only afraid I should hurt myself, traversing those narrow stairs without him: I dare say they *are* narrow and awkward. Yes, I will go; and old Jerome must attend me with the keys.”

Jerome, summoned by his lady to show her over the west wing, appeared in a state of intense astonishment, holding in his hand a huge bunch of keys. He was custodian of the abbey.

“Had not the lady better defer her visit till the morrow?” asked Jerome. “It will soon be dark.”

“Not at all, Jerome: I am going now,” answered Mrs. Pomeroy.

They proceeded through the cloisters of the north wing, to the north tower. Jerome fumbled over his keys; and, unlocking the door, they ascended the narrow staircase of the tower, Mrs. Pomeroy folding her skirts closely around her, and from thence passed into the west wing. There was no other mode of entrance to the west wing and the west tower than this.

Peering about her in the dim light Mrs. Pomeroy saw, as she and Jerome passed through these rooms, that they yet had some scant remains of furniture, though the hangings were dropping to pieces. When they came to the last room—Jerome called it so—Mrs. Pomeroy detected a small door at its end covered with tapestry.

“Jerome,” she exclaimed, “this must lead into the west tower.”

The old man had turned to one of the windows, and was looking steadfastly down into the court. Mrs. Pomeroy repeated her remark. “This door, Jerome. Open it.”

“That room is never entered,” he replied.

“Never entered!” returned Mrs. Pomeroy. “Why not? I shall enter it.”

“I have not the key,” avowed Jerome.

“Where is it, then?”

Jerome hesitated. "Maybe the lord keeps it. That's the haunted room, madam."

Mrs. Pomeroy had heard of the haunted room, both before and since she had entered the abbey. Not being so much of a believer in immaterial bodies as she was in weather-signs and similar omens, she became possessed with a strong desire to explore it.

"Has the lady never heard that apparitions have been seen there?" returned Jerome, in tones of awe.

"Apparitions don't appear before night sets in," promptly replied the Lady of Pomeroy. "Go back, Jerome, and hunt among all that heap of keys in that key-closet of yours, and find the right one."

Jerome had no power to say he would not go. He turned unwillingly, and attempted to take with him the bunch of keys which hung in the lock of the room they were in. No: try as he would, he could not take it out: the key, that he had himself put into the lock, was fixed in it.

"I think this key will only come out when the door's closed and locked," muttered Jerome, still trying ineffectually.

He went away at length. Mrs. Pomeroy, as much to pass the time as anything, touched the keys, and out they came. "What a curious thing that Jerome could not do it!" thought she. "They seemed to fall into my hand. That old man must be getting stupid."

She held them, and read their labels, which indicated the particular room each key belonged to. On one, however, was simply written "The Key." "The key?" debated Mrs. Pomeroy: "that must be the key of the haunted room, I should think. I'll try it."

She drew aside the hangings, inserted it in the lock, and, with a harsh, grating sound, the door flew open, the wind and the dust blowing unpleasantly in the face of Mrs. Pomeroy.

She shrank back. Her courage failed her. By daylight or in darkness, it is not pleasant to a mind in which any superstition exists to enter alone a "haunted" room. Mrs. Pomeroy went back to the casement and stood looking into

the court. There she saw Bridget. Obeying an impulse, she pulled open, with some trouble, the casement, trellised with its small panes, and signed to her to come up. Bridget was a native of Abbeyland, a daughter of one of the three brothers Rex, who had all, when living, been faithful followers of the late Lord of Pomoroy, and she knew all the traditions relating to the family. She looked thunderstruck at seeing her lady there, but obeyed the signal: came through the north cloisters, ascended the stairs of the tower, passed through the rooms, and joined her.

"Hold these hangings back for me," said Mrs. Pomoroy. "They are nothing but a cloud of dust."

The woman obeyed, but with a wondering gesture. "Does the Lady of Pomoroy know what this room is?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Pomoroy, passing in. "Come-with me, Bridget."

It was a small, circular room, panelled with dark oak. A narrow casement faced the quadrangle; but, like the other rooms, there was no look-out to the opposite side, the open country. The room was completely furnished with velvet that had once been red, but was now dark with age; chairs, a broad couch or settee, and a centre table, all were covered and hung with the velvet, which appeared to be dropping away. Mrs. Pomoroy saw no signs of apparitions: all that struck her was the smallness of the room. She remarked upon it.

"The tower walls are thick, madam."

"What is that?" she asked, as her eye became accustomed to the dark walls. "Why, that is a cloth, a velvet cloth, drawn over one of the panels."

"The picture is underneath," whispered Bridget.

"What picture is underneath?"

"The nun's, madam: she who was said to haunt the room. Would the lady like to look at it?"

Mrs. Pomoroy signified her assent. Bridget caught up the velvet and held it aside, disclosing a half-length figure, habited as a nun. The face was young, fair, and most lovely; but a strangely mournful and stern expression sat in the dark blue eyes, which were fixed full on the spectator.

The lips were slightly open, and one delicate hand was held up in a warning attitude.

"She is saying 'Beware,'" whispered Bridget, who appeared to be afraid of the picture hearing her.

Mrs. Pomeroy laughed. "Fancy goes a great way. Beware of what?"

"It is what she is supposed to be saying, madam, according to the tradition. But why, or to whom she is saying it, has never been decided."

"What is her history?"

"She lived in the reign of one of the Georges—the first or second, I think," began Bridget, delighted at having to tell the tale. "She was brought up in the convent and had taken the veil, though only seventeen, when in some way she fell in with him who was then Lord of Pomeroy. It was said to be in the fire, for the convent was partly burnt down and the nuns had to escape in the night."

"Was it this convent?—our convent?" interrupted Mrs. Pomeroy. "That we can see from here?"

"Yes, madam, this very convent. Though nigh upon a hundred years must have elapsed, the sisters there will tell you tales now that have come down to them of that trying misfortune. This young nun forgot her vows, madam, and ran away with the Lord of Pomeroy, to be his wife. He married her in secret, and he brought her to these rooms, this tower room being hers. The lord doted on her, it is said, and he had this picture taken of her in her convent dress, and hung up here: but, when it was too late, she found out he had played her false, for he had a wife already, that he was separated from. She went crazed, poor thing, all in one night, and she threw herself out of this very window, and was taken up dead in the court below."

Mrs. Pomeroy looked at the window. "She never could get through that narrow half casement, Bridget. The other half does not open."

"It is certain that she did, madam: she was young and slight: and perhaps the other half opened then. For years afterwards, during that lord's lifetime, she was seen at this same window on a moonlight night—the moon often shines

full on these west tower windows; the lady knows they face the east—her light hair hanging over her neck, and wringing her hands, as it is said she did wring them before she leaped out. Some say she appears still: my old Aunt Naomi for one."

"How is it you are so well acquainted with these histories?" questioned Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Why, madam, I have known them all my life—at least, since I grew old enough to be trusted. We Rexes know as much of the abbey's secrets and sayings as there is to be known."

Perhaps Bridget was a little mistaken there. Mrs. Pomeroy accepted it as truth. She was becoming greatly interested in the story of the poor young nun.

"The prediction is here," resumed Bridget, pointing to the picture. "But you can hardly see it, I think, madam: not sufficiently to read it. This room's dark in the after part of the day when the sun goes behind the tower. It must have set now."

"The prediction?" repeated Mrs. Pomeroy.

"It is the strangest part of the history," continued Bridget. "On the morrow following the accident, when she was lying dead, poor lady, in this very room, for they carried her up here, the lord saw some lines on the picture, close to the hand which she is holding up. It was never known who had written them; some people thought she had before she took the leap; but the lord knew that the characters were not hers, and they came to be regarded as having been done by supernatural agency. In the earlier part of a bright day they can be read without a light. At the time, people supposed they applied to what the lord had done, but it is believed that they are to affect a later Pomeroy."

"And what are they?"

"They betoken woe to the house," answered Bridget. "It is to be hoped they will not be realized for many a generation."

Mrs. Pomeroy had put her face and eyes close to the picture, endeavouring to decipher the lines. But she could only discern that some lines were there.

"The late lord—the one who had done the wrong was his grandfather—put little faith in all this, and I have heard him laugh over it," re-commenced Bridget; whose tongue, once set going on these topics, would never have stopped of its own accord. "He did not keep the wing always shut up; any of the family could come in who liked, and we had to dust and clean here once or twice a-year. He was a rare one for disliking dust and dirt. But when ——"

"Stay a moment, Bridget. In saying the late lord, do you mean him who died last?"

"Surely yes, madam. But, as I was going to add, the present lord had the whole wing shut up as soon as he came into power. The Pomeroy's are a proud race, the present lord is proud especially, and they deem the picture a memento of disgrace; a blot on the scutcheon of their ancestors."

"But," remarked Mrs. Pomeroy, "why not destroy the picture, and have done with it?—and have the rooms thrown open and embellished. I shall suggest it to the lord."

Bridget shook her head. "Madam, not a Pomeroy dare destroy that picture. An impression has passed down from father to son, since the time of the sinning lord—that whoever does away with the picture must look out for the cost, for that the fulfilment of the prediction will then be at hand. Whether my lord puts faith in it, madam, I can't say; likely not, for he is one of the boldest of a bold race: all the same, he takes care to keep the picture hidden so that no harm can come to it."

"I wish I could see the prediction," cried curious Mrs. Pomeroy, not feeling altogether pleased that Guy should have kept her in the dark as to these matters; have withheld this delightfully marvellous story from her. "Suppose you fetch a candle, Bridget?"

"Will the lady like to remain here alone?" hesitated the servant, halting at the threshold.

The Lady of Pomeroy settled that, by motioning the woman to hold back the hangings, and stepping down into the next room. There she took up her station at the open

window and leaned from it, that the outer air and the quadrangle below might keep her company.

In going down the stairs of the north tower Bridget met Jerome. "Where do you spring from?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"The Lady of Pomeroy called me, and I have been into the west tower with her. She——"

"Don't thee tell lies, girl," interrupted the old man, not believing a word.

"You are polite to-night," returned Bridget: "I have been into the west tower with my lady; into the haunted room. And now I am going to fetch a light that she may see the lines on the nun's picture."

As Jerome slowly gathered in the sense of the words, his mouth dropped, his hands were lifted. "In there!" he muttered to himself in consternation. "And the lord said it was never to be opened to her—that she was too young to be frightened with such tales. She found the key, then, after all my excuses! What possessed the other key, I wonder, that I could not get it away from the lock?"

"Why, Jerome," exclaimed the Lady of Pomeroy, when he appeared, "the key you wanted was on the bunch."

"As I find, madam. Pity I did not look more particularly."

Bridget came back with a light, and they all went into the room. Mrs. Pomeroy took the candle from her hand, and held it close to the lines on the picture. Bridget looked on composedly, and Jerome in abstraction, while she slowly read them.

"When the heir of Pomeroy goes forth a wife to win,
And the heir of Pomeroy goes forth in vain;
When the Lord of Pomeroy by a lie doth gain,
Then woe to the de Pomeroy's, twain and twain!"

Barely had Mrs. Pomeroy read this when a shriek from Bridget caused her to start back. She had inadvertently held the wax-light too near, for the writing was faint, and had set fire to the picture.

Bridget screamed on. What with the blaze and what with the superstitious fancies connected with the picture, the

ill anticipated upon its destruction, she really could not contain herself. Of a calm, equable nature, she had never in her life been so startled as now; it may be said so uncontrollably terrified. Combined with the superstitious dread came fears of the abbey's destruction by fire: and whilst Jerome was quietly putting out the flames, and scorching his poor hands in doing it, Bridget rushed into the next room, flew to the open casement, put forth her head, and shrieked, "Fire! fire!"

She was heard by one of the men, who happened to be in the cloisters below. He, looking the very image of incredulous surprise, for he knew nothing of this expedition of Mrs. Pomeroy's, alarmed his fellows, and a host of them started to run up. Jerome had put out the flames by that time, and was locking up the haunted room with the remains of the picture within it. Mrs. Pomeroy had come forth and was standing by the shaking and trembling Bridget.

"How stupid you are, Bridget!" she irritably said: for when vexed with ourselves, it is satisfactory to find a scape-goat to fall upon: and the accident had considerably vexed Mrs. Pomeroy. "It was startling for the moment, of course, but there's no need for you to shiver and shake like that."

"Madam—I—I beg your pardon. I felt just as if I should die."

The men came hastening through the west wing. Jerome, trembling almost as much as Bridget, told them all was safe now, and borrowed a couple of handkerchiefs to wrap round his hands.

Making way for the Lady of Pomeroy, and bowing as she passed onwards between them, the descent was made in dismayed silence. Only Bridget, who could not possibly lose much time in finding her tongue, lagged behind to exchange whispers with Jerome.

"She'll die in her confinement, Jerome."

"What d'ye say?" returned Jerome, really not understanding.

"I'm afraid she will; our poor lady! She has caused the calamity, you see."

"I wish my old hands had been burnt right off first,

rather than they should have brought out the keys at all," was Jerome's bitter answer. "But don't you go and set that stupid notion agate. You are old enough to know better. Just let the lord hear you say such a thing!"

"I've said no harm: and I'm sure if prayers will ensure her safety, she will have mine. But it's an awful thing to have happened! I thought she was holding the light very close. And now you come into Aunt Rex's parlour, Jerome, and let us see to your hands."

Barely had Mrs. Pomeroy gained her own rooms again, when Guy entered. Anxious about his wife, not caring to leave her longer than he could help, he had made a point of returning early. In her heart of hearts, she was somewhat afraid of her at times stern husband, and her courage failed her as she prepared to tell her tale. Would he be frightfully angry with her?

"Guy," she whispered, nestling to him as he took his seat by her on the sofa, "something very unfortunate has happened, and I want to tell you of it. I have had an accident and done some mischief."

The thought, passing through Guy's mind at this, was that she must have broken some one or other of the costly ornaments he had bought to adorn her sitting-room. Drawing her closer to him, a smile parted his lips as he looked down at her. All he could see was the parting of her bright brown hair, for her face was hidden.

"Dreadful mischief, no doubt," he answered fondly.

"I want you to forgive me for it; not to be too angry with me."

"I will not be angry with you at all: and I forgive you beforehand. What is it?"

In a voice that he could scarcely hear, and with her face still hidden, she told her tale, holding one of his hands the while between her own. How that, sitting alone in the oak-room, she had fallen on the wish to see the west wing opposite, and had gone to it with Jerome; and how that later, wanting to see the picture better and the lines on it, she had told Bridget to bring a candle; and—and"—there she broke into tears.

"And what?" asked Guy in low, strange tones, that did not sound like his own.

"Burnt it," she sobbed. "The flames of the candle caught the picture as I held it, and it blazed up, and burnt."

Not a word spoke Guy. Not a symptom of anger did he betray; nothing could be gathered from his impassive silence. Alice waited; but there came no sound, and she lifted her head. His thoughts seemed to have gone wool-gathering; his eyes had a far-away look in them.

"Won't you say you forgive me, Guy? I am so sorry; so vexed."

"Yes, yes," he answered hastily; "I said I forgave you beforehand. It does not matter: it cannot be helped. There, there, love; don't cry. But you should not have gone up without me."

"And what do you think the prediction meant, Guy?—something about the Heir of Pomeroy failing to get a bride, and the lord winning one by a lie?"

"I think nothing," replied Guy in sharper tones. "But don't go climbing about the abbey again, my dear; you are not in a condition for it. As to the picture, it was a memento of a deed which, if tradition may be trusted, was a disgrace to the name of Pomeroy."

CHAPTER X.

THE QUARREL.

THE round grey stone building, not large, but very old, called The Keep, stood near to the back of the Abbey of Pomeroy, its walls overgrown with moss. A gentle slope of green grass descended from it, then came a level dell or hollow, and then, on another gentle slope rose the west pile of the abbey. This had neither entrance nor window; no outlook of any sort: you had to travel round to the front before you could enter it.

Sitting near the keep on the dry warm grass one hot day in the beginning of October, was the lovely Lady of Pomeroy. She had thrown herself there in listlessness: for the old listlessness at times clung to her still. Pacing the dell before her, was the nurse bearing the infant, now some ten weeks old. The anticipated heir, so anxiously expected and for whom great rejoicings had been planned, had turned out to be a pretty little girl. The Lord of Pomeroy did not appear to care for the disappointment. He loved the child just as much as he would have loved the heir; ay, and was as proud of it. The rejoicings were to be held all the same: they had been delayed until his wife should be thoroughly restored to strength. Then the invitations went out, and on the morrow the abbey would be filled with guests. Guy had taken advantage of his last day of leisure to ride to Owlstone: and his wife sat, as you see, on the grass, before the old and uninhabited keep.

"Bridget, is the baby sleeping?"

"Just going off, madam."

"Then take her indoors."

Bridget moved towards the abbey with her charge. She had been promoted to the office of nurse to the child, simply because Mrs. Pomeroy had become fascinated with her tales and her legends of the dead-and-gone Pomeroyes, belonging to the ages as dead-and-gone as themselves. Bridget would recount to her mistress marvellous legends of the Pomeroyes' grandeur and chivalry, varied with whispers of the Pomeroyes' less laudatory exploits. Mrs. Pomeroy took quite a liking to the woman, and she assigned her the place of nurse to the child.

Mrs. Pomeroy sat on, her parasol held between her face and the sun. It was pleasant to recline there at ease, enjoying the warm and tranquil air. A great bleak place the abbey looked, something like a prison; this west pile before her having neither window nor outlet; nothing but its massive, unbroken, lichen-covered walls.

"Thank goodness this solitude will be over to-morrow!" ejaculated Mrs. Pomeroy. "I can wear my new dresses, and there will be people to see them. I'm sure I was quite well

enough for company a month ago, only Guy is so stupidly careful of me. How delightful it will be!"

Lost in this charming prospect—and to Mrs. Pomeroy, vain and frivolous, gaiety was always charming—she fell into a train of thought; from which she was aroused by the sound of footsteps behind her, hastening down the slope of the keep. She turned her head, and—— What was it that dazzled her eyes, as if the glaring sun had suddenly flashed upon them? What was it that dazzled her mind to bewilderment? She rose up, little conscious of what she did. Her cheek flushed and paled, paled and flushed, her hands trembled, her heart grew sick and her head dizzy. Whose form was it, that caused all this emotion?

It was that of a noble-looking man, of the remarkable height, the well-turned limbs, the fine make of her own husband; indeed just for a moment she thought it was Guy, and wondered what had brought him there. But no, it was not Guy: it was Rupert. Though much alike, Guy's countenance could not boast the remarkable beauty of this one, for Guy had his hare-lip, his stern look, and his unnaturally pale complexion. Yes, it was Rupert, Rupert whom she had not heard of, or seen, for two years.

Rupert Pomeroy drew a step back as she rose and turned her face to him; he had not observed her. She looked at him, not speaking, but she could not conceal the agitation which had taken possession of her whole frame: and he halted and stood before her. Alas! though she had resolutely thrust Rupert Pomeroy from her mind, and so believed she had thrust him from her heart, this sudden meeting served to show that the love had been only smouldering. She covered her emotion with a look of scorn, for that was the chief feeling kept uppermost since she believed that he had wilfully played her false. Not less scornful, however, was the tone of Rupert.

"It is a surprise to meet the Lady of Pomeroy."

Again they stood gazing at each other, neither speaking. Mrs. Pomeroy remembered her position as the wife of his brother, and she struggled to maintain it as she ought.

"I believe I speak to Rupert Pomeroy," she coldly said.

"Am I so changed that you need doubt it?" was his retort. "I should have thought, by the circumstances attending our last meeting, that you would only too well have remembered me. Have you forgotten that last meeting?"

She was thunderstruck at his audacity. "Do you know who I am?"

"To my cost I do know it. Guy's wife. But in that last meeting you swore to be mine. Alice," he continued, his voice trembling, "I trusted you from my very soul."

She could not understand. She advanced a step nearer to him.

"Are you trying to play off some deceit upon me again now, as you did then? To what end? You and I have nothing now in common."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing save hatred; contempt. They are what I feel for you."

He looked on her steadily, mockery in his eye and on his lip. She was excessively agitated; she could not understand his looks, his words. Instead of sinking to the earth with shame for his treachery, he appeared to throw blame and scorn on her.

"You are my husband's brother," she resumed, "and I will say to you what I would not stoop to say were I any other man's wife. Though, it may be that you are utterly callous to reproach. You came in secret to my mother's home to win my love——"

"And I thought I did win it."

"How dared you so come to befool me," she continued in agitation, waving away his interruption; "dastardly pretending that your love was mine?"

"Dastardly!" retorted Rupert, his eye flashing. "Was it more dastardly in one brother to seek you, than in the other? What though Guy was the heir?—had you wanted position and riches, why did you not say so?"

"I did not want them. You know I did not."

"You married them, at any rate, madam," he slightly returned. "And you made pretty good haste to do so."

"This show of recrimination will not serve your purpose,"

resumed Mrs. Pomeroy. "I should like an answer before I have done with the subject for ever. Once more I ask for an explanation, and if you possess a grain of honour you will give it—why you came, deceiving me with your false vows?"

"If you had aught about you as true as they were, you would do, Lady of Pomeroy. Whatever ill I may have done, I loved you faithfully: as I have never loved and never shall love another."

"You may spare yourself the avowal, Rupert Pomeroy: to what end, I ask, lie about it now? I know who it was you did love; whom you were loving and visiting, whilst you pretended to love me. But I am ashamed of myself for thus alluding to anything so disgraceful."

"As you have alluded to it, you had better explain, madam. I do not know what you are speaking of."

"You do know."

"On my word of honour I do not."

In Rupert's generally gay eyes there sat so earnest an expression that Mrs. Pomeroy felt staggered. Did he in truth not understand? She hushed her voice. "Have you forgotten that unhappy person who—who——"

"Pray proceed."

"Whom you took away with you?"

Rupert looked at her. "What person?"

"I know all about it. I blush for myself that I should deign to allude to it again—but I wish you to understand that, though you succeeded in deceiving me for a space, the enlightenment came. Therefore we stand on equal ground for the future."

"I ask what person," he steadily repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Gaunt's daughter," replied Mrs. Pomeroy, in a whisper.

After a stare of surprise, Rupert burst into laughter. Mrs. Pomeroy turned indignantly away.

He strode after her, and caught her by the arm. "Do you mean what you say, Mrs. Pomeroy? Is it possible that you suspect *me* of having abducted Sybilla Gaunt?"

"I do not suspect." "I know it was you."

Her contemptuous manner had been telling upon him. "Then, hear me," he said, almost as passionately as his brother Guy could have spoken. "I never had an ill thought towards Sybilla, I never had a grain of love for her; I swear it. You are entirely mistaken."

There was truth in his eye and in his tone. Mrs. Pomeroy turned pale. "Surely you know that she fell into trouble."

"I knew that. I suppose you ladies call it trouble."

Mrs. Pomeroy frowned. But she was in a very tumult of agitation, comprehending nothing, as it seemed, and could only pursue her questions.

"Did you know who was the author of it?"

"I did."

"Tell me, and I will believe all you say."

Rupert hesitated. "As to believing me, you must do as you please. If I ever spoke a word of truth in my life, I am speaking it now."

"Yes, yes, I do believe you. But you should not leave it in this uncertainty; you *must* tell me. Who was it?"

Still Rupert hesitated. "There exists a reason why it should not be known at Abbeyland," he said. "If I do tell you will you undertake to keep it secret?"

"I will."

"It was my brother George. Captain Pomeroy."

"Captain Pomeroy," she repeated below her breath. "Did he——"

"Ask me no questions," interrupted Rupert. "I can tell you nothing but the bare fact that George was the—the culprit. Who was it that put you on the wrong scent?"

"Guy."

"Guy! Then I shall have a score to settle with him."

"He believed it was you. The village believed it."

"Guy did not believe it—whatever the village may have done. The village laid many a peccadillo on my back, being a broad one, that had no legal right there. What did I care?—it made me none the sadder."

"Guy did not?" dreamily repeated Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Guy knew better. He knew as much as I did."

"Joan thought it," she continued. "My mother thought it."

"Very likely. I have a broad back, I say, and always have had one. Was this the reason that you broke your vows to me?"

"Yes," she answered, her pale lips quivering. "Guy came to me again one day, pressing me to be his wife: to get rid of his importunity, I confided to him that I loved you, and had promised to wait and be yours; and then he ridiculed my credulity, and told me that you were the cause of all that had happened to Sybilla Gaunt. He said that Sybilla had followed you."

Rupert turned from her to give a few strong words to his brother. "And then you married him?"

"And then I married him. I was mad, Rupert: I did not care what became of me. He has played us both false."

"He has played us both false," echoed Rupert, "false as his own false nature. And yet I never knew it was false until now; for, with all his sternness, I thought Guy to be the soul of honour. Let him look to himself!"

"But, Rupert, you never came, you never wrote," she pleaded, the tears raining from her eyes. "Why did you stay away in London all that time? What was I to think?"

Rupert coughed: conscience told him that he could clear himself less easily on this score than on the other. But the best of us have excuses at hand.

"I stayed there hunting after that government post which I expected. And, later, I got put into the Queen's Bench Prison: that must have been not long before your marriage. Do you know who put me there? Guy."

"Guy!"

"He did. In so far as that he would not advance a small, pitiful sum of a few hundreds to keep me out of it. He wrote word to our lawyer that a little spell at the Queen's Bench would do me good."

"Oh, Rupert! It has been a black plot of treachery against us both."

"It has; and it succeeded. He won you by a lie! Let him look to himself."

Rupert spoke in a pointed manner. Mrs. Pomeroy had

little doubt to what he alluded, and she shuddered as with a sudden fear. That wild prediction, bearing dread portent for the Lords of Pomeroy, and implicitly believed in—when one of them should win a wife by means of a lie—recurred to her.

Rupert Pomeroy touched with his forefinger Mrs. Pomeroy's arm: "You love me still," he dared to say. "Nay, no denial. I see it."

"From my whole heart," she answered, for indignation was strong within her; and she had begun to hate her treacherous husband with a deadly hatred.

Oh, foolish woman! Ill-trained, ill-regulated, devoid of conscience though she surely must be, how could she make so dangerous and wicked an avowal? The next moment she repented of it herself, the little grace within her was making itself heard, and some shame sat in her face as she said a hasty farewell to Rupert.

"Won by a lie," she muttered to herself; "won by a lie!"

Rupert told the truth. George Pomeroy was the culprit, not himself, and he had been in George's confidence throughout: had done his best to aid in keeping the affair a secret from John Gaunt.

This same morning, two or three hours before, as Gaunt sat at his early breakfast, Rupert Pomeroy had walked in. "Will you give me house-room, Gaunt, for a few days?" he asked, after greetings had passed.

"With pleasure; you know that, Mr. Rupert," was the warm answer of the unsuspecting keeper, with whom Rupert was a favourite. "But what has the abbey done to you?"

"The abbey! do you think I would trouble that?" returned Rupert. "Not after Guy's unbrotherly conduct towards me."

"What has he done!"

"He has let me languish in prison for I don't know how long, when three or four hundreds at first would have saved me from it. Yes, Guy might have saved me when I was first arrested, and I should have taken pretty good care they did not catch me again. Once in there, and the fact known, all the liabilities I possessed came down upon me together."

It was rather a jolly time, though, taking one thing with another."

"And how have you managed to escape now?"

"Whitewashed," briefly rejoined Rupert: and Gaunt drew in his lips with an expression of pain. "Yes, it is very degrading to a Pomeroy," Rupert added, noting the look; "but no one came to my aid, and I could not languish there for life. Guy will about die of it, I expect. Rare fun if he does."

Gaunt took the valise from Rupert's hand, and conducted him to the little square guest-chamber that was so rarely occupied.

The Lord of Pomeroy's business that day at Owlstone was to take the chair at a county meeting, involving some question connected with religion. Guy, energetic upon the point, warm and earnest in supporting his own faith, stayed to discuss the matter with some friends after the prolonged meeting was over, and reached home late. Alice was at dinner; she had not chosen to wait for him. Guy ran up to his dressing-room for a minute, and then sat down to table.

At dinner he told her about the meeting: what was said at it, what done. But that he was so completely absorbed in the topic himself, he might have noted that his wife listened with callous indifference, scarcely deigning to make any reply.

In point of fact, Mrs. Pomeroy was boiling over with wrath, burning to "have it out" with Guy. She fully meant never to forgive her husband what he had done; never: she waited to tell him of the meeting with Rupert, and all she had learnt at it. But the servants were present, and she had to condemn herself to silence.

As the attendants quitted the room, leaving the dessert and wine on the table, Guy drew forth a packet of letters—three or four, tied together—from his pocket. Owlstone had two posts a-day; Abbeyland only one; therefore when any of the abbey people were at Owlstone in the afternoon, they called at the post-office to see if any letters lay there. As Guy had done to-day; and found these.

He proceeded to open them. For Alice this was another

delay; he was always so absorbed in his letters, and she wanted his undivided attention. But the waiting was trying her; the tension of her nerves became well-nigh unbearable. Her breath was beginning to grow short; her throat to beat: she laid her hand upon her neck to still it.

"Great Heavens!"

The exclamation came from Guy: and it startled her. Startled her because he, the usually calm man, was so powerfully agitated. A dark flash of anger sat on his face, his eyes glared. The letter in his hand was in Mr. Hildyard's writing, their London solicitor; Alice could see so much. Surely it had brought some terrible news!

"He must have been mad!" groaned Guy. "The degenerate hound!—to have wrought this shameful disgrace upon our name!"

"Mr. Hildyard has?" questioned Alice, surprised into asking the question, her own grievances giving momentary place to her curiosity.

"Not Hildyard. That wicked brother of mine—Rupert."

The truth was, Mr. Hildyard, deeming himself compelled to acquaint the head of the family with the crisis that had taken place in the fortunes (or misfortunes) of one of its members, had tardily sat down the previous evening to accomplish it. And the letter on which Guy's eyes were strained conveyed the same tidings which Rupert had himself so unceremoniously spoken in a single word to Gaunt—that he had been "whitewashed." Perhaps hardly any other word or deed could have struck so humiliating a sound upon the haughty Lord of Pomeroy.

"He is worse than a serpent!" he raved: and Alice felt daunted as she saw his threatening face. "He is worse than——"

"Mr. Rupert Pomeroy."

It was Jerome who threw wide the door and announced him. Rupert came forward. Guy gazed at him as though he were an apparition.

"I had thought you would be alone," spoke Rupert lightly, addressing Guy. "You must have dined late."

The easy manner, the insolent words—insolent in Guy's

ear—only added fuel to fire. Dark reproach sat on his face; scorn on his tongue. Rupert recriminated on his own score: and Mrs. Pomeroy, who stood her ground, and at first was too terrified to do more than stand it in a remote corner, at length joined in.

What passed, none, apart from themselves, ever knew, but the storm terrified those of the servants who heard it. Jerome, almost out of his senses, remained in the ante-room: perhaps to keep others away. They gathered in the corridors and on the stairs. It ended by the Lord of Pomeroy's dashing open the door and ordering the servants to thrust forth his brother. They would have done it; they dared not disobey the lord when he had that temper upon him, or indeed at any other time; but Rupert walked forth of his own accord. Exaggerated tales of the interview went out to the village.

Mrs. Pomeroy passed swiftly from the dining-room in the wake of Rupert, and went to her child in the nursery. It was wailing a low wail of complaint or of pain. Mrs. Pomeroy took it, but it would not be soothed; there was still the same low wail; not a cry.

"I cannot think what's the matter with her," exclaimed Bridget. "She has never cried like this. When she does cry, it is like all other children, loud enough for half the abbey to hear, but not this strange wail."

No; Mrs. Pomeroy might try her best: the infant would not be tranquillized. Was it wailing for the distress that was coming on its home?

Tired at length with her efforts to soothe it, for a little thing soon tired Mrs. Pomeroy, she gave the child back to Bridget, went to her room, and rang for her maid. Theresa appeared almost in a state of collapse: she feared her lady must have had something to do with the cause of the quarrel.

"Which bed-chambers have been prepared for the guests to-morrow?"

"All that were available, I think, madam," answered Theresa. "All on this floor, I am sure; and some of those above stairs."

"Is the small room at the side of the north corridor, next to the blue room, ready?"

"Yes, madam. I know it is, for I helped to take the linen to the different rooms, and that was one of them."

"Carry my things there."

She had gradually (impressed, no doubt, with her own exalted dignity as Lady of Pomeroy), been getting into a habit of speaking imperiously to her servants, even to Theresa, therefore this curtness was no new thing. But the woman doubted in what sense to take the words.

"Remove all my things to that room, I say," repeated Mrs. Pomeroy. "Now. Call some one to help you. It will be mine from henceforth, instead of this."

Theresa was surprised. "And the lord's things also?" she asked.

"Mine, I said," was the sharp retort of Mrs. Pomeroy. She went outside, passed into one of the transverse corridors, and stood at its end window, apparently gazing into the courtyard. In reality she was gazing within herself, at her own outraged heart. Rupert's offence in "whitewashing" himself might be very humiliating, but what was that to her?—all her compassion was spent upon herself—all her bitter rage was given to Guy for the false trick he had played her. Her hands were clasped until the nails pressed sharply: but what cared she then for bodily pain.

A short time, and she turned to make her way to the dining-room, where she had left her husband. He was not there. She found him in the saloon where they generally sat after dinner; that gorgeously fitted-up room which Guy had made all gilding and beauty for her: a contrast to their own dark spirits just now. The mirrors reflected their countenances, and Mrs. Pomeroy's was scowling; but she had made a compact with herself to be cool and contemptuous, rather than fierce. They had had enough of fierceness for one evening.

Guy sat in one of her dainty chairs, calm, save that his eye was restless. His wife went up and stood in front of him. She placed her hands before her, one over the other, as a schoolgirl does when repeating a lesson to her

governess, and began in measured tones, steadily looking at him.

"Why did you bring this misery upon us?"

His grey eye flashed. "I have brought no misery. You will bring it upon yourself, if you behave as you behaved to-night."

"You have brought a misery upon us that will never end but with our lives. It never shall end."

"Speak for yourself," he rejoined.

"I do; but I also speak for you, Lord of Pomeroy. You shall go your way, and I will go mine: we are strangers from this hour."

"Perhaps you would like to go your way with Rupert," retorted the lord: thinking, though, in the plenitude of his security that such a catastrophe could no more take place than that the stars could shine at noonday. Since Rupert had both provoked him that evening unjustifiably by their incautious reproaches to him.

"No," she replied, catching her breath, and her face turning to crimson, "you have barred that for ever."

His lips parted, she thought to laugh, and closed again. She was mistaken there; nothing could be much further from Guy Pomeroy's heart and lips that night than laughter. Alice resumed.

"Why did you do so? Why did you come to me with that wicked tale—knowing it to be false?"

"I had two motives," he coolly replied: "and all tales are fair, you know, in love and war. I loved you; I was dying for you: and—I would save you from him. Allow that he was not guilty in that one particular case, other cases could have been told against him. Had you been suffered to marry him, he would have toyed with your heart for a month, and then have broken it."

"I was dying for Rupert," she returned, in low tones, while the large tear-drops of regret filled her eyes. "Far rather would I have been his wife for a month, though my heart had then broken, than yours for eternity."

Guy suppressed his just indignation. No one, save himself, knew what it cost him to do it, or how bitterly she was

trying him. "You shall not repeat such language to me, Alice; it is shameful of you to utter it."

"You have heard it before," was the agitated reply. "I told you, in the very hour that you came forth to win me with your falsehood, that I loved your brother with an all-enduring love: I told you I should never love you. You have not forgotten."

No, that he had not. Often enough he had winced at the remembrance of the words.

"On the day before our wedding a thought occurred—it must have been some good spirit sent it to me—what if you were deceiving me: and I put the question deliberately to you," she continued. "Do you remember your answer? I prayed you to tell me true; I said that should it ever come to light that you were so deceiving me, it would be bad for both. It has come now."

Guy rose from his chair. "Let us have done with this, Alice," he said, in a tone of conciliation.

"Done with it?" she repeated. "Yes, presently, when I have finished; but its effects will never be done with. Guy Pomeroy, I will no longer be your wife: never again; never, never."

He smiled. "Yes, you will."

"Never again," she murmured. "I would not do so wickedly: for my whole love is Rupert's. I thought that love was conquered; I did, indeed; but the sight of him has shown me my mistake. The fact is, since I became your wife I have striven to keep it under, to suppress his image in my mind; I would not suffer it to arise, I would not dwell upon it. Henceforward I shall cherish it and live upon it; so you see how impossible it is that I can remain here to be your wife."

Guy's lips were turning livid. "Have you any sense of shame left?" he asked. And truly she could possess little, thus boldly to beard her husband.

"You may obtain a separation; a divorce; anything you please," she continued, trembling with passion. "The sooner the better. And then you may bring home another to be the Lady of Pomeroy."

He caught her by the arm.

"You cannot beat me," she said. "The chivalrous Lords of Pomeroy do not beat women."

"You will tempt me to it, Alice, if you drive me to desperation," returned Guy; who, considering his fiery nature, was keeping his temper marvellously well. "Hold your peace."

"When I have said what I wish to say. At present, until these people who are expected shall have come and gone, there must be an appearance of amity between us: after that, I shall consider what to do: probably go home to my mother. But whilst these gossiping crowds are here, let us play a part: all suavity when before them; strangers when not."

"You pretty little schemer!" he laughed, a shade of contempt in his tone. "The Lords of Pomeroy don't part with their wives thus easily; although you seem so willing to resign your baby."

She looked up with a startled glance. "I should take my baby with me."

"Oh dear, no," replied the Lord of Pomeroy. "If you leave my home for a whim, you do not take my child."

"The law would give it me."

"Alice, it would *not*." And Guy was right.

"Do you know," she whispered, struggling to maintain her assumed calmness, "that you are tempting me to hate you with a double hatred. You have brought woe upon me for ever. I disliked you, Guy, before we married. I hate you now."

"You are bold, my lady."

"But for my own good name, and that the child may grow up to call me mother, I would have quitted your roof this night; ay, though the step had flung me into the arms of Rupert. There was a demon tempting me—had it been only to take my revenge on you."

"If you do not cease, I will have you confined as a mad-woman," cried Guy. "Surely you must be mad, to inflict upon yourself this humiliation."

"I have nearly said my say. To-morrow, before my

guests, you will find me all smiles and polite speeches again. My things are being removed to the small room in the north wing, and that will be mine as long as I remain at the abbey."

He leaned towards her, hissing rather than speaking: the haughty Pomeroy temper was being stung cruelly by these insults. "If you attempt to leave your own apartments, I will bar you up in them—and come and attend you as your keeper. You are mad, Alice."

"You won me by a lie," she returned, greatly agitated; "and, now that I know it, I am not bound to obey you. If a thief should steal a shilling, though he may get it into his possession, it is not legally or morally his. Did you forget the prediction?—the woe it threatens?"

Guy retorted with scorn. "Prediction? Threatened woe? Tush!—unless you choose to mar the peace of the house and bring it."

"There was to be great woe when that picture was destroyed," she said.

"Always remember one thing, Alice—that you visited the west wing and the picture in direct disobedience to me. But for that, the picture would not have been destroyed. I must try to teach my wife better behaviour. But I wish to do it in all kindness. You will order your things back to your own room."

"I will not," she steadily answered. "If you attempt to force me to it, I will go this night to my mother. Pretty scandal for the Lord of Pomeroy, when the guests shall arrive to-morrow and find his lady flown!"

Alice called him rightly; the Lord of Pomeroy: he was both lord and master. She went to the room that had been hers; Guy followed and closed the door. Bridget, who was near, was startled by the sounds that came from the room: recriminating words from both, though she could not hear their purport; very decisive and haughty ones from the lord, sobs and wails from her mistress. Sudden silence supervened. Bridget felt terrified, she hardly knew of what, went to the door with an excuse, and knocked at it.

It was opened instantly by the lord: he appeared to have

been standing near it, and her mistress sat by the table. Bridget could not see her face distinctly, for the room was only lighted by the large lamp, which hung outside in the court-yard.

"Did you call me, madam?" she hastened to say. "I thought you might want the baby, but she's asleep now."

"No one called," replied the lord. "Bridget."

"Sir."

"Some orders of your mistress's have been misapprehended—her things have been carried to the north corridor. Speak to Theresa and have them brought back again."

The things were carried back. Mrs. Pomeroy did not gainsay it; and the servants whispered. Oppose the iron will of Guy Pomeroy? his wife need not have thought it.

When rest and silence fell upon the abbey, there appeared to be rest and silence in the lady's chamber; but, had any been curious enough to listen, they might have heard the monotonous step of the lord, pacing it through the better part of the night.

It is an act of madness to pour spirit on a raging fire; little less so to control by angry force the fierce will of an indignant woman. That Mrs. Pomeroy had not a well-regulated mind has been previously pointed out, lest the reader should not see it for himself: though perhaps none, even of those who had been about her from childhood, suspected *how* ill-regulated it might become in a season of temptation. The steps taken by Guy—in this the first moment of her renewed fancy for Rupert and rage against himself—were not judicious ones. Far better that he had let her go to the lonely room, and suffered her indignation to spend itself there for a short time, a few days, and then have tried conciliation. It might have answered—after a little holding out; for a woman, look you, talk as she may, will think twice before she goes the length of actually quitting her husband's home, or of in any way separating herself from him. As it was, Alice Pomeroy was nursing all sorts of reprisals in her revengeful heart.

CHAPTER XI.

FOLLY.

IN the state dining-room below, never used but on occasions of large or extremely ceremonious dinners, sat the Lord and Lady of Pomeroy, entertaining their guests. A fine sight: a goodly company. The handsome dishes of silver-gilt, bearing their costly viands, crowded the board. Dinner à-la-Russe had not come in then; and the more prodigal the feast displayed on the table, the greater honour was accounted to be rendered to the guests.

The wax-lighted chandeliers hung from the ceiling; the sideboard glittered with its array of glass and plate. Numerous servants in their liveries of purple velvet and silver waited, headed by Jerome in plain attire, who stood behind his lord, and never served any one else. On the left of Mrs. Pomeroy sat Father Andrew; towards the middle of the table sat Mrs. Wylde. The priest was all merriment and good nature; it did one good to look at his rubicund face; he could hardly control it to solemnity whilst he said grace; Mrs. Wylde was gorgeous as dress could make her, but otherwise not much to be noticed: and as these two are all we know amongst the guests, the others need not be mentioned.

It was a grand old room; and was supposed to have been the chapel in bygone days, before the other chapel was built. The oak panelings were in small divisions and richly carved, each one having been formerly a monk's stall. Three high windows of painted glass, representing scenes in the time of the Crusaders, looked towards the quadrangle. They gave the only light the room possessed, consequently it was dark and sombre by day: but that fault could not at present be charged upon it. On these state occasions the painted windows were lighted up by means of lamps placed behind them outside; and they formed not the least of the room's attractions, particularly for those who had the good

fortune to sit opposite them, and so could be charmed at will by their rich colours during the whole banquet.

Who so gay as Mrs. Pomeroy, heading her table in her white robes of silk and lace, her favourite attire; who so calm, so equable, so courteous as her lord, facing her at the end of the long table? Of all the toilettes present, not one was more beautiful than hers; of all the faces, not one was so lovely. Upon her white neck, her arms, nestling amidst her hair, glittered the diamonds handed to her by Guy on their wedding-day; upon her cheeks shone the damask flush of excitement. This set of diamonds, and they were of rare beauty, belonged to the reigning Lady of Pomeroy, and to her alone: when she ceased to reign, they went from her.

Dear, most dear, was this show and state to Mrs. Pomeroy. Her heart was conscious of that. It was also conscious, for a little latent voice kept rising within it to that effect, that if she quitted the abbey, this show and state would, for her, be over for ever: it was only as the Lord of Pomeroy's wife that she could enjoy it. The homage rendered to her was only rendered in the right of Guy: separate herself from him, and she might return to the obscurity from which she came; obscurity, compared with the position she revelled in now. Mrs. Wylde was rich, but her riches would not gather about her an assemblage such as this: the guests of rank second only to princes; or the plate emblazoned with the Lord of Pomeroy's arms, handed down from generation to generation; or the time-worn retainers, who looked as if they could never belong to any but an ancient family. Yes; Alice Pomeroy had been raised to this supreme height, and she would certainly think twice before she wilfully forfeited it.

Ever and anon as she sat there, came a thought into her mind: "I should not like to leave it; I must do nothing rashly." Until this evening, which was the day of the guests' arrival, and the evening following the scene with Guy, she had been keeping up the ball of indignation with her own heart; had been feeding her enmity against her husband, saying to herself, "I will not live with him." But now, with all this glitter and glamour before her, she did

not feel so sure about it. Not a single word had they spoken to one another since the unseemly recrimination; she in her resentment would not speak; Guy deemed it best to humour her mood and allow her a little time to come to her senses. Amidst the guests were some who had never seen her; and Guy had performed the introduction with the most perfect suavity. For all any one could see, they were upon the pleasant terms that man and wife should ever be; she was lively, laughing, gay; he, courteous and attentive to all to the last degree. Ever and anon, as they sat opposite to each other now, she caught Guy's eyes fixed upon her—and turned away her own at once in resentment. He was the finest-looking man in the room, towering above them all; some little warmth sat in his usually pallid face; and, though the unfortunate upper lip was undeniably ugly, the well-carved Pomeroy features, and the dark-grey eyes were very beautiful.

The lord had begun by entertaining his guests right regally, as a Pomeroy loved to do; he would so continue to entertain them until the fortnight for which they were invited came to an end. Excursions of pleasure abroad, evening festivities at home, these were occasionally varied with men's out-of-door sports. The grandest fête of all would be that of the christening: for which Miss Pomeroy, who was to be one of the god-mothers, would arrive. And so, we leave them at the dinner-table.

The next morning the gentlemen went out shooting, Guy giving orders for luncheon to be sent to them. Some of the ladies proposed a drive to Owlstone, and carriages were ordered round. Towards mid-day, Alice, making her baby an excuse for absenting herself from the rest of her guests, left her mother to entertain them, put on her bonnet, and walked out. It was a most lovely day. October had brought in a true *été de St. Michael*, and this was the third of the month.

Yes, she walked out deliberately, knowing that she hazarded meeting Rupert Pomeroy: though indeed he might already have left Abbeyland. In later years, when she was bearing the burden of a life-long repentance, she

would tell herself again and again that she did not wish to meet him; that she would not have gone out purposely to do so. Most certainly she had no wrong thought in her heart; let us give her that due; she did not forget that she was his brother's wife.

Winding round to the south of the abbey, her beautiful morning dress of a delicate lilac colour trailing on the hot grass, she came upon Rupert. He was standing by the keep, just in the spot where they had met two days before. Rupert raised his hat and held out his hand; the colour rushed vividly into her face as she put out her hand to answer it.

"Taking a walk, Mrs. Pomeroy? You are lucky to find time for it, with the house full of people."

"Most of them are out," she answered, "and mamma is there. Oh, Rupert! I—I must tell you: we had such a dreadful scene."

"Who had? When?"

"I and Guy. After you left."

And then, most imprudently and inexcusably, Mrs. Pomeroy began to give Rupert the history of what had passed between herself and Guy. She was yearning for sympathy, and she had no one else to tell it to; and the sight and presence of Rupert, whom she still passionately loved—though it is a humiliation even to record it on paper—called up again all her resentment, her ill-feeling towards Guy. One word, one avowal led to another; Alice did not spare her husband; all the bitter things she could say were heaped upon him. The fact of Rupert being his brother justified this in her own mind; to any other man she, with all her incaution, would not have been so imprudent. And Rupert, far from repressing, met her half-way, for had he not grievances on his own score to settle with Guy, and abused him to her heart's content. Thus, in close conversation, now one speaking, and now the other, and pacing slowly round and round the keep, they, chancing to lift their heads, saw a company of sportsmen at a great distance.

"Oh, Rupert, Guy is with them!" she suddenly exclaimed: "and they are coming this way! It will make him more angry than ever to see me talking with you."

Without a word, Rupert touched one of her hands and drew her to a small low door in the wall at the back of the keep; it flew open, and admitted them.

"You are safe here until they have passed," he whispered.

"But how did you get the door open?" she asked in wonder. "I always understood that little door could not be opened from the outside."

"Neither can it be, except by me and the lord. Yes, Jerome knows the secret; I forgot him. There is an invisible spring."

"The lord!" she uttered, in breathless agitation. "Suppose he should take it into his head to enter now?"

Rupert smiled, drew a strong iron bar across the door and secured it. "Not a dozen lords combined could enter now."

"Suppose he were to come in by the front-door?" fear suggested again.

"My dear Alice, what should bring him with the great key of the keep? I don't suppose it has been taken from Jerome's key-closet for years."

But Mrs. Pomeroy held her breath and trembled; conscience and fear were making a coward of her. And serve her right—she had no business to conceal herself. That was the first false step.

She took another within the next five minutes. She and Rupert stood, straining their ears to listen for the voices and footsteps of the sportsmen, but the walls were thick, for the door had admitted them to a room within the keep, not to any court or yard without it.

"They must have passed by this time," said Rupert, at length; "I will go up and see. Would you like to look over the old keep, Alice?"

"Oh dear, no," she hastily replied. "I am only anxious to get out of it; I tremble lest any untoward miracle should bring Guy in."

Rupert laughed. Ascending the narrow stairs he made his way to the front of the building, and peeped out at one of the quaint loopholes. Yes, the sportsmen had come that way. "They are down in the dell now, half-way to the abbey," he said, returning. "All is safe."

"Oh, thank goodness! Open the door for me."

"As soon as they are out of sight. You may finish what you were telling me here, as well as outside. There is no hurry."

"I dare not, Rupert," she said. "See how I am trembling. I shall make haste to the abbey, before he can find that I am out. They must be coming back to lunch, although he ordered it taken to them."

"I don't see that you need be so afraid of him."

"But I am. It is his turn, just while these people and mamma are with us; she takes his part in everything—and he nearly frightened me to death that night. But my time will come."

"Has Mrs. Wylde been told, then?"

"No. But I know how she would take it, if she were. I am sure they must be out of sight now."

Rupert undid the door and they passed outside together; he closed it again after him.

"We cannot part for good like this, Alice, with your tale half told," he said. For what with her elaboration in the recital, and the interruption on both sides to abuse Guy, the history was not ended. "Meet me here to-morrow and finish it; I may be far away the next day."

"Oh, Rupert, I am afraid."

"If you mean afraid of me, you are more foolish than I could have thought you," he rejoined. "You were not afraid to meet me once, and I did not attempt to harm you: I should certainly not be likely to attempt it now. If you mean afraid of Guy, he cannot see you inside here. I will have the door open at this hour, and be waiting for you."

"I have no one in the world to tell my anger and grief to but you, Rupert, and if I cannot tell them to some one they will break my heart," cried the weak woman.

"Of course they will," laughed Rupert, gaily; attaching as much importance to the silly words as they deserved.

"If I thought it would not be wrong to come!"

"Where would the wrong lie?"

"After all, Guy's your brother."

"He is, and you are his wife. I am not likely to forget it."

"Of course you would not forget it; neither do I. Then I will come, Rupert."

False step the second—and a very false one.

"Why, where have you been?" cried Mrs. Wylde, chancing to meet Alice in the corridor as she stole in. At least her soft steps, and her gown upheld to still the sound of its rustle, looked like stealing in. "I have been to your rooms, but Bridget had not seen you—and there's the poor baby crying for you."

"My head ached, mamma; I went out for a little stroll," briefly responded Alice, making the best of her way onwards. "Baby's all right."

"Oh, and Alice, the gentlemen have come back to luncheon," Mrs. Wylde called after her. "The birds were shy, and they grew tired."

"Nice sportsmen!" muttered Alice, with a toss of the head.

Mrs. Pomeroy did not forget on the following day the appointment she had made with Rupert; be very sure of that. Down deep in her heart there sat a latent consciousness that she might be acting unwisely; but she was cherishing the revengeful feeling towards her husband with the most inveterate obstinacy. Had all the saints in the chapel warned her not to meet Rupert, she would not have listened to them.

Leaving her visitors to occupy themselves as they best might, or be entertained by her mother, Mrs. Pomeroy went forth to the meeting, just as the little chapel clock was ringing out its twelve strokes for mid-day. Guy was away again, the sportsmen having gone to-day to a greater distance. She found Rupert waiting for her at the little door of the keep, which stood open.

"Good-morning," said he. "I began to think you were not coming."

"It is only twelve o'clock."

"Only twelve! I have been here these twenty minutes. And you know the old Spanish proverb."

"No I don't. What is it?"

"To expect one who does not come; to lie in bed and

not to sleep; to serve and not to be advanced, are three things enough to kill a man.' I don't say they would kill me, but I never was famous for patience. Will you come in?"

"No; I am not going inside to-day. We can walk about whilst I finish the history of what Guy said and did; and then I must go back again."

"As you will," replied Rupert. And he was turning to shut the door of the keep, when, somewhat to his surprise, Alice whisked swiftly past him and went within of her own accord.

"There's Father Andrew," she whispered.

Rupert looked round. The priest had come out of the chapel, and was halting at its entrance, as if uncertain whither to bend his steps, this way, or round to his own house beyond the graveyard. Rupert followed Mrs. Pomeroy, and shut the door.

"I'm sure you need not be afraid of the priest," said he. "What though he did see me walking with you? Is it treason?"

"He might tell Guy," said Mrs. Pomeroy.

"And what if he did! There's no harm in your doing so. Guy would not eat you for it."

"He might—shake me. I declare, Rupert, I thought that night, more than once, that he would have shaken me."

"How you must have provoked him!" laughed Rupert.

"I did. I said everything I could to do it. He was quite mad!"

Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute, you know. Once within the keep, Mrs. Pomeroy seemed reconciled to the situation, and made no move to go out again. In truth, she was afraid of being seen. Other eyes might be about, as well as Father Andrew's. She knew well enough that she ought not to be with Rupert whilst he and Guy were at variance with each other; it was like "going over to the enemy;" least of all, ought she to meet him clandestinely. He was her husband's brother, and, being so, on the face of things, it seemed that there could be no harm in it; but, remembering the terms on which Guy and Rupert were, and

her own former love for Rupert, even the elastic conscience of Alice Pomeroy warned her that it was what she ought not to do. As to Rupert, his conscience was elastic at all times, but he had the high, honourable instincts of a Pomeroy in all that related to the Pomeroy, and most assuredly he would not have wronged a brother. Neither would he have willingly brought Guy's wife under Guy's censure, bitterly though he was feeling towards himself. It was very pleasant indeed to meet Alice, and join her in abusing Guy.

Rupert perched himself upon a high stone ledge projecting from the wall; Mrs. Pomeroy sat on the opposite side of the room on a low stool creaky with age: and there they talked away at Guy to their anger's content; but it was all highly wrong and foolish, and she, at any rate, ought to have known better.

"I told him I would quit the abbey as soon as these people went, Rupert," she observed, after bringing her narrative of the quarrel between herself and Guy to a conclusion. "And I think I shall do so."

"Quit the abbey?" questioned Rupert, not knowing in what sense to take the words. "How do you mean?"

"Quit it for good. Quit *him*."

"That *would* be wise!" returned Rupert, in tones that proved he thought the contrary.

"But there's baby, you see," debated Alice, as she leaned forward, her elbow on her knee, her chin on her hand. "I am afraid he would keep it. He said he would. He said the law would give it him."

"I dare say it would. Do you want my opinion?"

"If you will give it," she answered with a half sob.

"That you could not take a more unwise step. It is one you would probably repent all your life. Having adopted the abbey for your home, there's nothing for it, that I see, but to remain in it."

"I like it for some things," confessed Alice, thinking of the show and the splendour. "But I don't like Guy."

"You should have thought of that before. It's too late now."

"Will you please look at your watch?" cried Alice, thinking him not very complimentary this morning.

It was half-past twelve. Rupert jumped off his perch, and Alice rose. In walking towards the door, a thought struck her.

"You have not told me where you are staying, Rupert?"

"At Gaunt's."

"At Gaunt's! Oh, then you are friendly with him!"

"Why should we not be friendly?"

"Well—I thought about Captain Pomeroy, you know."

Just for the moment Rupert, who had his hand on the spring of the door and his face turned back towards her, did not seem to gather her meaning. "About Sybilla," she added.

"It would be hard if the sins of one brother were to be visited on the other," answered Rupert, a smile crossing his lips. "Even if Gaunt were aware that George had injured him—which he is not."

"I have fancied that. Sybilla must have shielded her lover's name from exposure as jealously as though he were gold. Where is she now?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Do you think George——"

"I do not think anything about the matter," interrupted Rupert, in tones that admitted of no appeal. "My own peccadilloes are enough for me to carry, without troubling myself about those of my brothers. We Pomeroyes do not interfere with one another. The best thing you can do, Alice, is to forget Sybilla Gaunt. Above all, remember—remember always—that I have confided George's name to you in strict confidence, as regards this affair. Never let it escape your lips."

"You may trust me. Will you look out and see that the coast is clear?"

The coast was clear. It was a very lonely spot, rarely frequented, and not a soul was in sight. For a few minutes they paced about underneath the keep: and, when they parted, another appointment was made for the morrow. Rupert avowed that he was not going away from Abbeyland

just yet : he had formed no plans, and might as well stay a few days longer as not.

And so, as the days went on, Mrs. Pomeroy suffered herself to fall into the habit of meeting Rupert : and the habit, considering his reckless character and the temper she was at present indulging, was not altogether a safe one. All the old love was revived in the heart of each ; and that was not altogether safe. Neither of them had any ill intention, not a thought of wrong : had danger been mentioned to them, each would alike have scorned the suggestion.

Not every day, but as often as she could safely accomplish it, did Mrs. Pomeroy go forth to meet Rupert in the keep. There was no more cause for their seeking the shelter of the keep than for remaining in the open air, only that within it they were safe from remark. No doubt it wore a bad appearance, these secret meetings in that shut-up place ; that is, it would have done so had there been eyes to observe them. But the eyes would have seen nothing worse than Rupert perched on his stone ledge, and Alice on the low stool by the opposite wall, both talking away eagerly, the theme generally being the treachery of the lord. That was all ; but, as above remarked, it was altogether hazardous and objectionable.

The guests had been at Pomeroy Abbey ten days, three-fourths of the term they were invited for, when the day of the christening dawned. It brought a disappointment. Much wonder, some concern, had been excited the previous evening in consequence of the non-arrival of Miss Pomeroy. This morning Guy received a letter, saying they were not to expect her. The indisposition of her sister's children—which had delayed her coming—had culminated in scarlatina. It was of a very mild type, she wrote, and would no doubt soon be well over ; but she felt that she ought not to come to the abbey and risk bringing the infection with her to Guy's little baby. Guy was very sorry ; he thought much of having his sister Joan at the service ; but her decision was of course a right one.

And, with much pomp and ceremony, the little girl, adorned with her magnificent robes, was carried to the

chapel, and there received the solemn rite of baptism. The names bestowed upon her were Mary Alice Joan. Mary after the lord's mother, Alice after his wife, Joan after his sister. In the evening there was a great banquet: at which none shone so brightly or looked so gay as Mrs. Pomeroy.

The love of Rupert was filling her whole heart; and the daily meetings with him, innocent though in one sense they were, had become ominously dear to her. I shall see him to-day, was the one thought that would flash over her mind when she woke in the morning: and in her gladness she was even civil to her husband.

And Guy? Guy was just trusting to time and to himself to make it all right with his wife; and he had no more idea that she was keeping up the ball of abuse of him, or treacherously meeting Rupert, than had the man, in the moon.

But, one evening, two days after the christening, when Alice had gone to the nursery before dinner, Mrs. Wylde came in. Alice looked rather surprised as her mother carefully shut the door and came forward.

"Is any one in the inner room, Alice?"

"No. Bridget went downstairs for something or other. Why?"

"What brought you to-day marching round the keep with Rupert Pomeroy?" proceeded Mrs. Wylde, without circumlocution.

At that moment Alice's baby was lying on her lap, its pretty little face turned upwards, its eyes closed in sleep. She bent over the child, seemingly to do something to the frill of its nightgown: in reality to gain time. For the sudden question rather startled her.

"Who says I was there?" she asked, her face flushing.

"Now, Alice, don't equivocate: it will not serve you. You *were* there, and with him: and you were with him in the same place one day last week also."

"And if I was?" retorted Alice, resolving to meet the matter boldly, and raising her head: "Is it high treason?"

"It is high folly," returned Mrs. Wylde. "Very un-

justifiable, considering the bad terms that exist between Rupert and the lord, and that he is forbidden the house."

"Rupert is not on bad terms with me. If we—if we chance to meet, I may surely speak to him—and walk a few steps by his side?"

"Don't do anything so disloyal again, Alice. Rupert Pomeroy has lowered the family with his debts and his evil courses; the lord feels it keenly; and you, his wife, should at least have the grace not to countenance him."

"And pray, mamma, who has brought tales to you of me and my movements?"

"Lettice chanced to see you, and mentioned it to me."

"'Chanced' to mention to you that she saw me last week, and 'chanced' to mention it to you to-day. I should call Lettice a spy."

"Nonsense, Alice! Lettice is nothing of the sort. She had no ill-intention in speaking to me. But, my dear, I beg of you to be cautious. Do not be seen with Rupert Pomeroy again: it would not be pleasant to your husband."

"Oh, of course *he* must be studied!"

"Well," concluded Mrs. Wyldc, not altogether liking the rebellion in her daughter's words and manner, "do not forget, Alice, that *I have warned you*."

Oh, that she had taken the hint! Wilful, mistaken, senseless woman! But for her folly the terrible tragedy that ensued would never have occurred.

It was just as though her mother had spoken to the winds. Nay, the very speaking rendered her present mood only the more resentful. She continued to meet Rupert; partly because she liked to be with him, partly because she knew how angry it would make Guy, and therefore was a sort of revenge upon him. Moreover, as she told herself, she was doing no real harm to any one: and it would soon be over, for Rupert was going back to London. The post, promised him so long ago, he intended now to look after in earnest. And thus the days went on to the end.

For the end came: in more senses than one.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE HAUNTED ROOM.

It was the day previous to that which was to witness the departure of the abbey guests, and close upon mid-day. Mrs. Pomeroy had left them to their own devices, and was going forth to another stolen interview, when on turning out of the abbey gates she encountered Bridget and the baby.

"What are you here for?" she began, in her imperious way. "I ordered you to take the child through the village, up towards the forest."

"I am going, madam. But," added Bridget, dropping her voice, "I have just met Mr. Rupert, and he sent me back with this. He bade me lose no time in giving it into your own hands."

It could scarcely be called a note that the girl held out. It appeared to be a leaf taken from a pocket-book, folded, and tied round with string: as though the writer had not been able to find any better fastening. Mrs. Pomeroy took it gingerly in her fingers, with a suitable show of surprise and reluctance.

"Mr. Rupert sent you with this! To me! Why, what is it, I wonder? What can he want? You need not wait, Bridget."

Bridget turned away with her charge. Her mistress untied the string, and saw a few words in pencil.

"*Don't come to-day.* The keep is no longer safe: and I suspect that I am being watched. I will be in the west tower to-night; in the haunted room. Come up there for a minute; I will not keep you longer—just that I may explain. You will find the doors open."

Mrs. Pomeroy tore the paper into minute bits, and scattered them to the winds. Turning back to the abbey, she shut herself into her chamber and sat down to think.

To say that the words puzzled her would be saying little to express the utter astonishment that filled her mind. They

also alarmed her. “‘I will be in the west tower to-night.’” she soliloquized, repeating the words in the note: “he must surely be out of his senses to say it. He could only get there by passing through the abbey: and that he would not dare attempt just now. What can it mean? There must be some mistake. And the keep no longer safe!” ran on her thoughts, herself slightly shivering. “Has Guy——”

Mrs. Pomeroy stopped. Fright drowned the rest of the words. If Guy had indeed found out that she held these interviews in the old keep, he would be ready to kill her.

She remained all day in a state of agitation; of suspense; of anxious curiosity to know the best and the worst. But she had no means of satisfying herself; for she dared not walk out on the chance of meeting Rupert. Had he not said he was watched? Perhaps she was watched also? And what Rupert could have meant about the west tower was beyond the bounds of imagination to divine. Mrs. Pomeroy did not attempt to go to it.

The following morning witnessed the departure of the guests. At least, of most of them. It was the seventeenth of October: a day to be darkly noted henceforth in the annals of the Pomeroyes as the most terrible that had ever dawned for them. Three or four of Guy’s particular friends, men, would remain a day or two longer: on the morrow a great onslaught was to be made on the pheasants, and they stayed for it.

At one o’clock Bridget came in from her walk with the baby, and Mrs. Pomeroy, an intensely fond mother, ran upstairs. She was taking the baby from Bridget when the woman gave her another note. Mrs. Pomeroy opened it.

“Why did you not come? I waited for you in the west tower for three hours. I saw you open your chamber-window and look out; but the casement where I stood lay in deep shadow, and I deemed it might be unwise to open it, or to make any signal. I shall be there again this evening: come for an instant, as I leave for good to-morrow. You will find the doors open. I have chosen the west tower as being perhaps the only place where I should never be looked for.

“R.”

So ran the note: and Mrs. Pomeroy, reading it a second and a third time, thought surely magic must be at work. That Rupert was not deceiving her in saying he had waited for her in the west tower, she felt sure—and, indeed, to what end would he deceive her? Yet—how could he have ascended to it? It was hardly possible that Rupert could have passed through the abbey and taken Jerome's keys without being seen by the servants. Could it be that he had bribed the servants—had talked over old Jerome? She hardly thought it; for they were all true, heart and soul, to their reigning lord, and the dissension between him and Rupert was no secret. At the best, it was dangerous. Dangerous for Rupert to attempt anything of the kind; dangerous for him to go up to the west tower. But it would be far more dangerous for her to go—and that she was resolving to do. Full of sinful dissimulation—dissimulation in such a cause is nothing less than sin—she began scheming how she could best contrive to get up to the west wing unperceived.

She was not feeling well, she told her mother in the afternoon. She told her husband so, making a merit of the necessity of speaking to him, and speaking civilly. She should get them to excuse her at the dinner-table: sick of the continual feasting, weary after the exertion of playing hostess to so many guests, she should take a cup of tea in her own room in preference to dinner; perhaps should go to bed; and her mother could head the table for once for Guy and the two or three men who remained. No opposition was made to this, either by her mother or the lord: and all things seemed to go on smoothly for her scheme.

Evening came. Dinner was again laid in the state banquetting-hall below, though so few would this time partake of it; and when they were seated safely at table, Mrs. Wylde facing Guy, Alice's time was come.

Trembling, not so much at the deceit she was enacting as at the thought of penetrating by dark—or rather by moonlight, for the moon shone full and bright—to the west tower and that haunted room in it, Mrs. Pomeroy prepared to set forth. She had felt a horror of the room ever since the day

of the accident to the picture, and a vexed feeling had rested on her mind for having gone to it in the teeth of the expressed wishes of Guy; but to meet Rupert and say farewell to him, she was ready to dare it now.

Quitting her apartments, watching her opportunities so that she might escape the eyes of the servants, sheltering herself now in this corner, now in that, Mrs. Pomeroy got safely below into the cloisters, and thence into the north wing. The north tower-door stood open for her, and she ascended the stairs. Whether she would have had courage to go through the rooms of the west wing alone remains unsolved, for there, at the top of the stairs, stood Rupert.

"Where's Guy?" he whispered, as he took her hand in greeting; and the anxious question proved that he was not easy as to Guy.

"At dinner in the banquetting-hall. I told him I was ill, and could not go down. He thinks, no doubt, that I am sulky."

Rupert descended to lock the door, and make all secure; but as they went on into the next rooms, she shook so that he was obliged to hold her. *She* was not at ease either.

"Rupert, this is what I ought not to do, and I would not have come had I known how else to see you. But I am so terribly anxious about the keep; I have had no peace since that first note of yours, and I wanted to ask you what had happened. Oh dear! must we go into that haunted chamber?"

"It will be pleasanter for you because you can sit down," he answered, pushing open the door of the room.

The moonlight shone into the chamber, revealing its ghastliness—and ghastly enough it looked by this light to the imagination of Mrs. Pomeroy. It shone on the mysterious picture, and on the *défacure* caused by the burn, when she had accidentally held the candle too close to it. Whether the canvas was damp, or whether it was in a degree fireproof, or whether the spirit of the nun was present to protect her own image and property, was uncertain; but all the burn had done was to smoulder away into smoke, destroying a portion of the picture, leaving an ugly black stream stretch--

ing upwards and across; but, strangely enough, sparing alike the face and the prediction. As Mrs. Pomeroy now saw how little damage had been done, compared with the wholesale destruction she had fancied, she thought old Jerome must have been very awkward and clumsy to scorch his hands so much. All things were as they had been left that night. The lord had given no orders upon the matter, and the servants had been only too content not to meddle of their own accord. Perhaps in the subsequent commotion, attendant upon the birth of the little girl, Guy had forgotten all about it. Or, it might have been—it might just have been—that Guy had taken care to assure himself of the amount of the injury: and, finding that the chief features of the picture remained, had concluded the destruction foretold was not yet accomplished, and therefore left it alone as before. This would accuse him, however, of a belief in the superstition.

The prediction was in Mrs. Pomeroy's mind as she stood there in the moonlight, every line, every word; the lines were ringing in her ears with an ominous sound.

“When the heir of Pomeroy goes forth a wife to win,
And the heir of Pomeroy goes forth in vain;
When the Lord of Pomeroy by a lie doth gain,
Then woe to the de Pomeroy, twain and twain.”

Ominous indeed! More ominous than they had ever sounded before. She heaved a deep sigh, and turned away from the picture. Rupert crossed the room, and took up his standing by the window.

“Why do you sigh?” he asked.

“Why do I sigh? I have enough to make me sigh, taking one thing with another. And I am in mortal dread of Guy's finding out that I have met you. Have you been dining out?” she added, suddenly noticing that he wore evening clothes.

“Ay, at Knox's. I had to come away at the second course.”

“But how did you manage to get up 'here?” she exclaimed, sitting down on the old velvet-covered couch, to be more at her ease while she put her questions. “I feel

bewildered: I cannot make it out. How many of the servants saw you pass the corridors?"

"Not one of them, either last night or to-night. I took care."

"But, Rupert, many of them are always round about Jerome's key-closet."

"They did not see me; and, if they had seen me, they could not have known me. Look here."

He suddenly enveloped himself in a friar's grey cloak, throwing the capuchin—or hood, as the English call it—over his head, so as to effectually conceal his face: just as a fair dame does when she goes out of heated rooms at night.

"And your hat?"

"I wore none. I got Father Andrew to lend me this cloak yesterday," he continued, turning himself round in the moonlight for Mrs. Pomeroy's inspection. "He wanted to know what midnight expedition I was bent upon. Sly dogs, our priests," laughed Rupert; "they know the use of the capuchin themselves——"

"Oh, Rupert!" she interrupted, her tone savouring of rebuke: "Father Andrew is as good as he can be."

"I believe he is. I was only joking. He likes a joke himself," added Rupert, speaking out of the hood. "Had any of the servants seen me in this attire, far from recognizing me, they would have flown away scared, thinking the nun there," pointing to the picture, "was abroad to-night."

He threw off the cloak as he spoke. Mrs. Pomeroy rose, went to the window and peeped out.

"Caution, Alice. The moon is bright, and your face might be discerned here from the house. Had she not been under the dark clouds last night, you might have seen mine."

"I thought it utterly impossible that you could be here: I thought you must have made some great error in saying you should come. How did you obtain the keys?"

Rupert Pomeroy stole his lips towards her ear. "Filched them! Stepped aside to Jerome's closet-sanctum, and filched them."

"Filched them!" echoed Mrs. Pomeroy. "Jerome keeps-

it, locked—even if you contrived to escape meeting the servants.”

“It is not always locked; and luck favoured me: it often has. I have had possession of the keys from last night to this.”

She thought his manner strange: lighter than usual when with her. He appeared to speak in a laughing, insincere sort of way, as though he were making game of her, or else of his own assertions. Years and years afterwards she remembered it.

“How very imprudent! If Jerome had missed them to-day the whole abbey might have been roused.”

“No fear,” laughed Rupert again. “Jerome would not miss them.”

“Rupert!” she suddenly exclaimed, a light breaking in upon her, “Jerome has aided you to come here!”

“No he has not. Not a soul has aided me, save Father Andrew, in the loan of the capuchin; little guessed he that it was to steal a visit to the Lady of Pomeroy. Jerome has aided me in another way, though—you do not ask about the keep.”

“I have been putting it off,” she replied, sitting down again on the couch. “The thought of it frightens me.”

“We have had a spy upon us, Alice, as sure as that we are here. Whether the lord has found out anything for himself, or whether he has been put on the scent by others, I cannot say: I think it is the latter; for, if he had watched you to the keep, he would most certainly have pounced in upon you.”

“But how did you learn anything at all?” she interrupted, not allowing him to go on steadily. Rupert smiled at her impatience. He was leaning against the wall beside the casement, his arms folded.

“I learned it through Jerome. Yesterday he made his appearance at Gaunt’s, and began talking to me about the keep in a whisper, though Gaunt, and his housekeeper, old Nanny, were both abroad and I had the place to myself——”

“What did he say? What did he say?”

“If you interrupt me in this way, we shall never get to

the end of the story," laughed Rupert. And as the reader may be saying the same, it may be as well to give it as it occurred.

Jerome made his appearance at the gamekeeper's lodge the previous morning, as you have now heard, voice, tread, manner alike stealthy, just as a schoolboy's when he is at some mischief. "Mr. Rupert," he began, "do you go at all to the keep?"

"Why?" asked Rupert.

"But do you, sir?"

"I have been in there once or twice."

"Ah, I was sure of it!" cried old Jerome. "I wish you'd go away from the village, sir, until matters are smother between you and the lord: ever since that quarrel at the abbey the other night, a feeling has been upon me that worse might come. This morning before breakfast the lord came to me: 'To whom have you entrusted the key of the keep?' he asked: and I saw that something was wrong. 'It has not been out of my custody since the late lord died,' I answered. 'You lie, Jerome,' he cried: 'You have lent it to my brother, Rupert Pomeroy. Or else you have kept it so carelessly, that some one has been able to get possession of it for him.' Well, Mr. Rupert, with that we went on to the key-closet, which I unlocked; and in my flurry I looked in the wrong niche for the key, and did not see it. The lord stood by with folded arms. 'I thought you were faithful,' he said, and it made my old eyes water, for faithful I am and have ever been to the Lords of Pomeroy—and I am not the less so to you, Mr. Rupert, so far as I can be. The lord saw my distress. 'Some one was in the keep yesterday, Jerome,' he said in a kinder tone: 'I tried the spring of the door, and could not get in, therefore some one must have been there and had put the bar up.' 'Here's the key, sir,' I said, showing it to him: 'in my haste I looked in the wrong place. I have not given it to Mr. Rupert.' 'Then,' said the lord, when he saw the key, 'the secret of the spring must be known to some person—and the most likely person is my brother Rupert: who else would dare to meddle with the keep?' And so, Mr. Rupert," added

the old man, "I thought it my duty to come and tell you this, for I conclude, sir, it was you who went into it."

Such was the story Rupert repeated to Mrs. Pomeroy. Ere it was concluded, she rose in terror and grasped Rupert's arm; terror at the thought of what might have come of it, had the door of the keep not been barred. It is true that the worst the lord could have seen (and this has been said before) was Rupert lodged on his high shelf, and Mrs. Pomeroy swaying herself on the low stool opposite, abusing himself confidentially: but that would be quite enough, as we must all allow, to raise the ire of most husbands, more especially one so fiery as the Lord of Pomeroy.

"Jerome added that Guy took possession of the key," continued Rupert to Mrs. Pomeroy, "and reiterated his warning to me not to enter the keep again. The foolish old fellow actually had tears in his eyes. I fancy he knows you were there with me."

"Oh!" she screamed.

"I gathered it from a remark he made—that one of the maids had seen you walking with me by the keep. Confound all women's tongues! And now, Alice, you know why I sent you that first note by Bridget——"

"If she had shown it to any one?" gasped Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Who? Bridget? No fear. She is one of those who are true to the Pomeroy's, heart and soul. And I really was unable to think of any safer place than this, where we could meet for an explanation and say farewell. Guy is as sly as a fox: and as keen as a fox once his doubts are aroused. Of all places, he would never think of the haunted room."

"Do you really go to-morrow?"

"I go to-morrow. I should have left to-day had you come last night. It may be better I should be away, as old Jerome says. Badly though Guy has treated me, I don't wish to sow dissension in his home: and my staying here might result in that."

She was weeping silently. Rupert Pomeroy was very dear to her, and she was about to lose sight of him, perhaps for ever: but she, as silently, wiped away the tears, so that he should not see them.

There is an expressive Italian proverb—I forget precisely how it runs, but the sense is, that for the debtor's bond and the stolen interview, time flies on wings. On wings, most certainly, it appeared to fly for those in the haunted room. Mrs. Pomeroy may have been unconscious of its flitting; let her answer it; but when the courtyard clock rang out ten, she was still there.

With a faint cry of dismay she started up and approached the window. Was it indeed ten?—or only nine? She strained her eyes on the clock, for it was above the entrance archway, and faced her; but, strain them as she would, she could not distinguish the hands: the dial was too far off. Rupert followed her, though little cared he what the hour might be.

“Have you a watch, Rupert?”

“No, I left mine at Gaunt's: the spring's broken.”

“I do fear it was ten that struck. And, what if Guy should have been up, and missed me? I must go at once; without delay.”

As she turned from the window, accustomed now to the faint light of the room, she distinguished a tall dark figure standing up against the picture. Fascinated and terror-stricken she gazed; not with ghostly terror, but with terror far more ominous and real—for too well did she discern the outlines of that form, and knew it to be no other than her husband's. Rupert, whose sight was particularly good, was peering at the opposite clock, when he found himself suddenly and unexpectedly startled by his companion's seizing hold of him and shrieking out in her agony of shame—“Oh, Rupert! Rupert!” For surely it was nothing else than shame, to her, to be caught in this clandestine interview!

The Lord of Pomeroy strode forward, his eyes glaring, his white features terribly livid in the moonlight. How stealthily he must have come up! And—how long had he been there?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLIMAX.

WHAT a terrible situation it was! The moonlight streaming in upon the haunted room, with all its ghostly associations, and upon Guy Pomeroy standing against the picture: Guy, who had come to interrupt the interview. His guilty wife—guilty, at any rate, of mean duplicity towards him—cowered in her terror. Rupert, turning sharply round from the window at her cry, wondered what the matter could be.

Guy Pomeroy strode forward, his white features livid in the moonlight. Thrusting his wife out of reach of harm, spurning her with his foot, for in her dismay and fear she had sunk to the ground, he drew a double-barrelled pistol upon his brother. The ball missed him, entering the dark wainscoting: and yet Guy Pomeroy had a sure hand in general. Ere he could draw again, Rupert closed with him, and they grappled for the weapon. Mrs. Pomeroy heard the deadly scuffle, as she sped, moaning, from the chamber, through the rooms of the west wing, and gained the stairs of the north tower. In her haste and terror she fell down these stairs against the door below: and just then she thought she heard the report of the second barrel, but of this she was not sure.

Up again in a moment. She seized the key which Rupert had left in the door; but whether she turned it, or whether it was previously unlocked, she never knew. Probably the lord had left it unlocked when he entered: though, how he had contrived to enter, considering that Rupert had locked the door on the inside and left the key in it, was a mystery. Perhaps Rupert in his carelessness, his fancied security, had not locked it.

The door, opening into the cloisters, stood ajar. Mrs. Pomeroy flew out, sank down on one of the green benches of the quadrangle, clasped its arm tightly, and hid her face on it—just as we clasp the nearest support for protection

on awaking from a terrific dream. She moaned under her breath; not aloud, lest any one about should hear; she stilled her sobs of remorse and agony: and then she cast stealthy glances up to the window of the haunted room.

Trembling, moaning, cowering; feeling that to die would be a mercy: even the wainscotting, which had received the ball, she could envy, and wish it had been her own bosom: Mrs. Pomeroy sat there till the clock struck the quarter-past ten. Her ear was stretched to listen for her husband's footsteps, descending; at their first distant echo, she would have crept, like a worm, underneath the bench, in her sense of shame. If he saw her there, would he come out and put her to death?

But the probability was that he would stalk, straight onwards through the cloisters. And Rupert?—how would he come?

"Cannot I go into the lady's room yet?" she heard one of the servants say, who appeared to meet another in the passage. "Getting on for eleven o'clock, and it's not put to rights for the night."

"No," replied the voice of Theresa. "The lady said she should try and sleep her headache off: I was not to go to her room on any account, unless she rang. The door's fast."

Mrs. Pomeroy shuddered, and held the bench convulsively.

The minutes rolled by, almost killing her with their slow protraction, and the clock chimed the half-hour. In that one half-hour she seemed to have lived the agony of a whole lifetime. Neither had come down; neither Guy nor Rupert; of that she felt certain, for her ears were strung to a strange fineness. She gazed up at the window; an unbroken gaze now. What was taking place there? Were those two men, meted in height and strength, perhaps in ferocity, struggling on with each other until one or the other should be overcome, struck to death? *Which* would conquer? In this terrible suspense she continued, until the clock struck eleven. A whole hour, and neither had appeared! Were *both* dead? Her heart and throat were working, her ears singing.

She could not bear it longer. It seemed that her brain

was giving way. Slowly, cautiously, a step at a time, she stole through the cloisters to the staircase door, put her head up, and listened. There was not the slightest sound. Up still, a stair at a time, and now another, went she, and again she stopped to listen. Nothing—nothing. And so on, through the west wing to the last room in it, silently and creepingly. She paused at the door of the west tower, of the haunted room: little thought she of supernatural visitants now, the earthly ones were filling every crevice of her imagination. The door was not closed, only pushed to, and the same silence reigned within—a silence that was every moment becoming more awful. She would have given half her life to hear one of Guy's oaths, or Rupert's sarcasms. Dead—were they?—and for her?

She pushed the door open, and then shrank back and drew up against the wall, lest the movement should have caused alarm; but neither sound of alarm nor anything else issued forth to indicate that the place was tenanted; so, pulling back the drapery, she peeped in. She had come out of the lighted quadrangle, and her eyes could see, as yet, nothing in the room but darkness; the moon, at that moment, had gone under a cloud. No: still there was no movement, no sound, and she ventured to enter the room. She was stealing towards the window, a vague intention of standing there—whence she could look below and seem less lonely until she should become accustomed to the darkness—floating through her scarcely sane brain, when she fell over something. Putting out her hand to save herself from quite falling, it touched—either a hand or a face. It seemed like the latter—and it was cold, with the coldness of death.

Her nerves could bear no more: this was the climax. Uttering shriek upon shriek, and tearing along as if the dead were following her, down she flew again in all the terror of superstition. The noise penetrated to the abbey. The servants came forth, bearing lights; the guests, who had then come to the quadrangle with their cigars, ran in the same direction—all to meet Mrs. Pomeroy, her face white; her eyes strained. The servants caught her; and she lay, convulsed, in their arms. Mrs. Wylde came up.

All crowded round Mrs. Pomeroy, one universal sense of consternation prevailing. Emotion and fear had brought on something like a fit, attended with hysterical sobbing. Speak, she could not; but she shudderingly pointed, now to the stairs of the north tower, now to the windows of the haunted room in the west one. What she could mean by indicating the north tower no one was able to understand; for, that it should be open, was suspected by none. But the other movement was more readily understood, and the servants exclaimed simultaneously, "She has seen the ghost!"

"Go, go," she gave utterance to at length; "*there*," pointing to the haunted room. "Some one is lying dead."

That her words should be looked upon as the ravings of a disturbed brain was natural; nevertheless, old Jerome crept away to his key-closet, and then to the north tower. Had he discovered that his keys were missing? He came back from the staircase with a face as apprehensive as his lady's.

"Who will go with me?" he said, looking first at the gentlemen and then at the men-servants. "If they are at warfare, one man will be powerless to part them."

All were ready to go, none comprehending what they were to go for, or what there was to do: and they went in a body towards the stairs, bearing several lights. One of the guests, Lord Sones, drew Jerome apart.

"What do you suspect?" he asked.

"I suspect—I suspect there may be a dispute," Jerome slowly said.

"Between whom?"

"Nay, my lord, but I know nothing. Do not detain me."

Jerome took a light from the hands of one of the servants, walked quietly before them, and led the way up through the west wing. At the door of the haunted room he halted, turning round to face those who were following.

"I must go in first alone," said he, his tone one of assured authority. "I am the oldest retainer in the family, in the confidence of the Lords of Pomeroy, and I demand it."

He passed in and let fall the hangings, no one attempting to dissent; but in less than a minute he held them up and spoke, his voice sounding like a wail,

“Walk in now. Oh, woe! woe!”

Holding their breaths, the crowd pressed in. Woe! woe! as Jerome had said: for there lay one of the combatants in the arms of death.

“It is the Lord of Pomeroy!” cried the affrighted spectators.

“It is the lord, and my dear master,” wailed Jerome, with a burst of tears: and he crossed himself and raised his hands to heaven.

Still and motionless it lay, that fine form, its face turned upwards; the cold face that Alice had touched.

So Rupert had mastered: had obtained possession of the pistol in their mortal struggle, and shot his unfortunate brother!—for the bullet was subsequently found in the head. The lower part of the face was also bruised and battered, as if by blows.

It must be remembered that those now gazing on him possessed no clue whatever to the tragedy, its cause, or action; neither could they give the slightest guess as to the perpetrator. Jerome doubtless suspected, but he kept silence. Horror-stricken, bewildered, sick, they began to look about the room for a solution of the mystery, throwing the light of their torches hither and thither. Who had done it—how and why had it been done? Nothing was to be seen except the ordinary and dilapidated furniture, and the dust on the floor, disturbed as by a scuffle, and the nun’s damaged picture resting so still in its frame.

“What’s this?” exclaimed one of the guests, snatching up a dark grey cloak, and exhibiting it to their view. “This is not the lord’s. Ah, ha! this will lead to a discovery.”

“I know that!” interrupted a servant. “It is Father Andrew’s capuchin. He wears it sometimes when he comes to the abbey on a winter’s night.”

“Father Andrew’s!” echoed the disbelieving assemblage; and they began to abuse the speaker.

“I could swear to it,” doggedly persisted the man: “I know it by those two rents in the tail of the skirt. The father said he got it caught in a gate one windy evening.”

Father Andrew, a priest, and an unoffending man, attack

the lord!—for of course the words bore that implication. The thing was not probable; it was inexplicable. Jerome, who had sat down on the edge of the velvet settee, lifted his sad face, and slightly shook his head in dissent. That the motive had nothing to do with robbery was apparent; the lord's signet ring was on his finger, and his gold watch and chain had not been touched. When his pockets came to be examined afterwards, their contents were found intact: keys, pocket-book, purse, and handkerchief with the great crest and supporters, only used by the Lords of Pomeroy—the younger sons using the simple crest. The clothes were much torn, proving how severe had been the scuffle. But Father Andrew! what could have brought *him* in the fray, even as a spectator—or his capuchin? And where had he got to?—and where was the murderer?

The question, as to the priest, was soon set at rest; for, into the room walked the reverend father himself, his form as roundabout, his red face as merry as ever, presenting quite an opposite appearance to all popular notions of a midnight assassin. The terrified women below had sent for him in haste.

"What's to do?" cried he, in broad good humour. "Some one seen the ghost?"

They made way for him, and threw the light on the floor. Father Andrew's countenance changed. He stepped back awestruck.

"The lord!" whispered he. "Is he dead? How was it done?"

"It is the lord; and he has been attacked and murdered," hastily spoke one of the upper servants. "Does your reverence know this?" added the speaker, picking up the cloak.

"That's mine," said the priest.

"How came it here, father?"

A light, as of horror, seemed to break upon him. "I lent that to—to—a friend," he stammered.

"To whom?"

The priest was silent. He did not seem inclined to say. Lord Sones took a step forward. He was not a Roman Catholic.

"Sir," said he to Father Andrew, "it appears to me, as it no doubt appears to those who stand here with me—my fellow guests at this house, and the old retainers of my poor friend, lying there—that it is incumbent upon you to speak, and say to whom you lent the cloak. A most foul deed has been done: and that cloak is the only clue we possess at present to its apparent perpetrator. You must freely state to whom you lent it."

"Rupert Pomeroy. He came to me yesterday and borrowed it."

There was a pause of dismay: and poor Father Andrew, who, in his allegiance to the Pomeroy, had spoken unwillingly, and because there was no escaping it, gave vent to a groan of pain.

CHAPTER XIV.

ESCAPED.

THE public commotion was without parallel. Nothing like unto it had ever stirred up that remote and quiet district. The Lord of Pomeroy had been murdered (it was thus people put it) by his brother Rupert.

The police took the affair into their hands at once, and collected details at will. Thus, while the death-flag waved over the abbey-gateway, and the poor dead lord lay in state in the chapel, according to the Pomeroy forms and customs, a great deal became known of the few days preceding his death, and of the movements of his false and foolish wife. The secret visits paid by herself and Rupert to the old keep were discovered and talked about. Not a single half-hour, as it seemed, had she lingered there, but it was now declared. The servants, it appeared, had seen her enter it, or leave it, Rupert with her, more often than was thought for: and the police, metaphorically speaking, turned the servants inside out. And though these visits had been

innocent, in one sense of the word, as the reader knows, can it be wondered at that they assumed a guilty aspect now, regarded in the light of the tragedy that had ensued?

Nearly the first thing the police did, on being called in, was (after visiting the west wing, and locking it up), to search thoroughly the inhabited parts of the abbey, particularly the apartments specially occupied by the Lord of Pomeroy. Not to find Rupert; the intelligent reader will understand that; but to come, if possible, upon some clue that would throw light upon the meeting between the brothers, and its deadly ending. During this search they found the *second* note written by Rupert to Mrs. Pomeroy, asking her to come to him in the west tower. The first note she had torn into small pieces and scattered them to the winds, as may be remembered; pity, for her own good name, but she had also torn the second. And how she came not to do it must remain unaccounted for: unless it can be explained by that fatality which so often attends the commission of folly and sin. This note was taken possession of by the police. Its delivery to Mrs. Pomeroy was traced, by dint of close inquiry, to Bridget, who had to confess to her share in it, and her having received it from Mr. Rupert. She had to confess that it was the second note thus delivered: she had to confess that she had more than once seen her mistress and Mr. Rupert enter, or leave, the keep. Never had the Pomeroy's a more faithful adherent than Bridget, but she could not help speaking now. The result was not favourable to Mrs. Pomeroy. The bare imprudence and folly of those meetings would have been sufficient to condemn her; and to such matters the worst construction is generally given.

Alice Pomeroy's condition was pitiable. She lay in her room in a semi-passive state; moanings, half-suppressed, escaping her lips from morning till night, from night till morning; her anguish of mind more than pen can paint. It was thought by the medical men that she would have lost her reason.

The police could make nothing of her: she neither admitted nor denied anything. When questioned by the coroner in the presence of the jury, she said little more.

Having been the only witness to the quarrel, she had to be questioned, otherwise they would have spared her. She lay, wrapped in shawls, on the sofa in her bedroom when the deputation was admitted, being really too weak and prostrate to receive them otherwise. She had thought it no harm to go to the west tower to say farewell to her husband's brother, she murmured; her husband came up; he fired off a pistol, which did no harm, and then there ensued a scuffle: she was frightened, and ran away. No more did she say than that: and, indeed, there was no more to say. The coroner, a man of gentlemanly feeling, asked her no inconvenient or personal questions. He retired with his jury; and they brought in a verdict of wilful murder against Rupert Pomeroy.

Rupert had escaped. How, or by what means, none could tell. That he was still concealed somewhere in Abbeyland, perhaps even in the abbey itself, was conjectured by the police, and the search after him was keen. Not a house, rich or poor, but found itself pounced upon by the police at all sorts of unexpected and unreasonable hours, sometimes when its inmates were in bed and asleep; but without effect. Suspicion was directed to the Knoll, the residence of Rupert's great friend, Charles Knox: it was there that Rupert had dined on the fatal evening. Mr. Knox threw his house open to the search, but Rupert was not found. No person whatever, so far as could be learnt, had seen Rupert since the fatal fray. Gaunt testified, and with truth, that he had not returned to the lodge; and the things belonging to Rupert remained there unclaimed. Bills, headed "Murder," in large letters, were posted about, offering a reward of two hundred pounds for the apprehension of Rupert Pomeroy. Mrs. Pomeroy would lie shivering in her bed, hoping, praying that he might not be taken. The life of one brother was enough for her to have sacrificed, without the other.

She did not conceal from herself that it was from her own folly, her sin—call it by which name you will—that the terrible catastrophe had come. In these dread moments of bitter remorse, the conscience does not play at hide-and-seek with itself. Alice Pomeroy's very soul was wrung with

anguish. Over and over again she wished she had been dead ere the calamity had fallen.

The great fear, that Rupert would be taken, lay ever upon her. Never did her chamber-door open but it caused her a shiver of dread, lest tidings were being brought that he was found. How he had escaped from the west tower she could not imagine: unless, indeed, he had followed her down almost immediately, before her ears and heart got on the rack, and so made good his stealthy exit. Now and again she felt a dread that he might still be concealed in the west wing; but as day after day went on, this wore away. Moreover, the police had thoroughly searched there. Mrs. Wylde remained at the abbey, a scared look for ever on her face, a shrinking manner palpable to all.

Tidings of the fatal occurrence were despatched to Miss Pomeroy, and she arrived at the abbey accompanied by her brother-in-law, Henry Chapel. Shocked, distressed, horrified, Joan listened as she learnt the details of her brother's death, and of the disgrace brought on the house by the woman he had made his wife. Whether innocent of actual crime—as she might be—or whether guilty of it, Alice Pomeroy had assuredly been the originating cause of the calamity, had directly led to it. This was Guy's reward!—for having raised that inferior-born woman to his own rank, for having loved her with a passionate love, and showered down daily care upon her—this!

In her bitter grief, her anguish, Joan reproached Alice. Not loudly, not severely, but with stern truth. Alice shivered, and answered nothing. Mrs. Wylde would have taken up her daughter's defence, but she began in a lame, shame-faced sort of manner, and Joan swept out of the chamber. Mrs. Wylde could not soften facts; she could not bring back to life that unhappy man who had been hurled to death, and died unshriven. So long as Joan should live, her heart would ache for him, her most ill-fated brother.

And in the height of the commotion the place was in, which had not one whit subsided, in the midst of the active search for Rupert, the day fixed for the interment arrived. A sad funeral, a solemn ceremony; that which attended to

his last resting-place Guy, Lord of Pomeroy; made doubly sad and solemn by the terrible circumstances of his death. People came to it from far and near, as they had come to that of the old lord; ecclesiastics high in the Catholic church; nobles, friends, relatives, retainers. Leolin Pomeroy crossed the channel, and officiated as chief mourner.

Up to the last hour Guy had lain in state in the chapel in his coffin. Many a tear was dropped over him, many a sob suppressed. Pomeroy would not know a better lord. Guy might have been stern and cold of manner, but he was generous of heart. He would have righted wrongs, but never inflicted them; he would have succoured, but not oppressed.

And so, with all this state and ceremony, that was so needless, and that seemed so inappropriate under the circumstances, but that was deemed necessary by the family when burying its lord, Guy was put into the cold chapel vault by the side of his late father; and the people went home, leaving him there. And the death-flag, waving over the abbey gateway, was exchanged for the hatchment. And Joan, in her superstitious heart, said that this had been the working out of the prediction. Or, perhaps but its commencement! Who knew?

It was on his return home after the funeral that Jerome craved an interview with Joan. He came to ask permission to retire at once from the abbey and take up his abode in the keep—which place, as may be remembered, had been bestowed upon him by the old lord for life, whenever he should choose to retire to it. The calamity had sensibly affected Jerome, this faithful attendant of the Pomeroy. Since its occurrence he had worn a bewildered air; his manner, as he went about, was timid, as if he feared his own shadow. His occupation at the abbey was gone, he told Joan, when preferring his request, and the tears rolled down his cheeks as he said it. Mrs. Pomeroy he declined to serve; and the new lord, George, was not there. For the renegade, Rupert—now still being hunted for, that he might answer at his country's bar for his crime—could not inherit, and George was the Lord of Pomeroy.

"Why ask my permission, Jerome?" was Joan's sad rejoinder. "What have I to do with it?"

"Nay, Miss Joan, who else is there to ask?" replied Jerome. "You are the only one left: Mr. Leolin, he will be gone again to-morrow. I cannot stay here, Miss Joan; no, not another night; the abbey is too painful to me now: my lord's gone; and it's no longer the place for me. I should like to be away from it, ay, before sunset."

"As you will, Jerome," she answered. "It is painful to others as well as to you. I leave it myself to-morrow. Stay a moment," she added, as he was turning away after speaking his thanks, "I want to put a few questions to you which I have hitherto shrunk from. Things are not clear to me, Jerome; not clear. Give me your own version of what happened on that fatal night."

Jerome pushed his grey hair from his brow, let his hand rest on his right temple, and paused. Joan thought he was recalling the facts to his memory.

"We all went up to the west tower together, Miss Joan, the guests that were staying here and many of the men-servants. I——"

"Not that; I understand all that," interrupted Joan. "What I cannot quite fathom is, how he, my unhappy brother, Rupert, got up to the west tower."

"It has been a mystery to us all, madam."

Joan dropped her voice to a whisper. "I cannot help suspecting that you must have helped him, Jerome. Both nights."

"Before the holy saints that hear me"—and Jerome crossed himself—"I did not. I declare to you, Miss Joan, that I knew nothing of Mr. Rupert's having gone there either night. I got to know of his visits to the keep through the lord questioning me, and I had heard the maids talk of it besides; and, to confess the truth, ma'am, now all's over, I took upon myself to warn Mr. Rupert not to go to the keep again, and to ask him to leave Abbeyland until things should be smother between him and the lord. But I never knew of his visits to the west tower: any such idea, as that he would attempt to go to it—that he *could* go to it—did not

enter my mind. Far from suspecting he had gone up the last night, I did not know but what he had left for London—and I most devoutly hoped it.”

Joan could not get rid of her puzzle. “Jerome, it seems next door to an impossibility that he could have gone to your closet and taken the keys without being seen. Through the cloisters and passages he might perhaps escape notice; but your key-closet is in the very heart of the inhabited apartments.”

Jerome looked ill at ease as he answered. Joan did not now doubt him, but an idea stole over her that he might suspect one of his fellow-servants.

“He must have managed to do it, Miss Joan. He was in Father Andrew’s capuchin, and might easily have been mistaken for him.”

“Hardly,” replied Joan; “the one is slender and very tall; the other short and stout.”

“The servants were about elsewhere both nights,” pleaded Jerome, as if he would excuse their want of observation. “When a state dinner’s on in the banquet-hall, there’s always a great deal to do. Mr. Rupert must have known that, and felt pretty safe in risking it.”

“Do you suspect any of the servants of aiding him?” she pointedly asked.

“I do not,” was Jerome’s emphatic, and evidently truthful reply. “Miss Joan, there’s not one of them would dare to touch the keys.”

“Then you can tell me nothing more of that night than I know, Jerome?”

“Indeed I can’t, madam,” was the old man’s faltering reply: and the tears rose to his eyes again as he said it.

Joan sighed. She glanced at the door to make sure it was closed, and then spoke again.

“Can you think, Jerome, where he can be?”

But Jerome, instead of answering, gazed at her beseechingly—as if silently imploring her to drop the subject. Joan fancied that he looked a little bewildered.

“I speak of *him*, Jerome, that most unfortunate Rupert. That he must have speedily followed Mrs. Pomeroy down-

stairs, as is supposed, and made his escape from the abbey in the general confusion, there can be but little doubt. Have you any idea where he is?"

"Alas, no," sighed the old man.

Joan wrung her hands. There were moments when the misery that had fallen on their ill-fated house pressed more heavily upon her than she knew how to bear.

Jerome bowed himself out from Miss Pomeroy's presence, to take up his abode that night for good in the keep. And on the following morning Leolin Pomeroy, with his sister, and Henry Capel, quitted the abbey.

The days went on. No tidings were heard of the unhappy Rupert. But, that he had not yet succeeded in making good his escape from the neighbourhood, appeared to be certain. At least, if the word of Cannel, the butler at the White House, might be trusted.

Two or three nights subsequent to the lord's funeral, Cannel, in returning home from the abbey, whither he had gone on an errand to his mistress, met Rupert. It was in the short, dark, narrow lane, dark from its overhanging trees, that led from the high-road to the side of Mrs. Wylde's house. They met face to face. But, before Cannel, in his dismayed surprise, could take a second look, could speak a word, could even as much as mechanically touch his hat, Rupert turned short round, crushed himself through a small gap in the hedge, and was gone. Cannel's hair stood on end. A well-meaning man, but not overburdened with sense at the best of times, he took a few moments to consider what he ought to do, and then ran back to the abbey. Asking for Theresa, he told her of the encounter. Theresa carried the news to Mrs. Wylde. That lady, much more dismayed than Cannel—for she hoped with her whole heart Rupert would escape, to avert further consequences and the scandal that must follow—enjoined them both to secrecy, keeping it also herself. But the fact was suffered to ooze out later. Therefore, unless Cannel's sight deceived him, which was very unlikely, Rupert was then still at Abbeyland. Perhaps—who knew?—he was essaying to make his escape from it that very night.

It was as well, perhaps, that the search after him failed: as, fail it did: for, if taken, he would hardly escape the terrible death to which his country's laws must condemn him. He had been cruel in his vengeance, beating his unfortunate brother to death. The medical men thought that the shot would not have killed immediately: the beating did. Thus Rupert had justly passed out of the succession, to give place to George.

When Mrs. Pomeroy grew sufficiently well to be conversed with, her mother urgently begged of her to return to the White House; to make it her future abode, and never to inhabit the abbey again. After what had happened, it might be thought that it would have been the more seemly course for Mrs. Pomeroy to adopt. She turned, however, a deaf ear to the counsel: for her child's sake, if from no other consideration, she should not quit the abbey. So Mrs. Wyldo returned to her house alone, leaving her daughter to her loneliness and her miserable reflections.

Throughout the whole of the long winter, Alice Pomeroy never quitted her rooms. Her mother she saw sometimes, and Father Andrew: no one else was admitted to her, excepting her own personal attendants. Theresa had a close and anxious time of it. There Mrs. Pomeroy shut herself up, nursing her remorse and her anguish. One lively terror lay ever upon her—that Rupert would be taken.

As spring advanced, and the weather became genial, a sad figure, veiled and draped in crape, might occasionally be seen wandering in the more sheltered parts of the garden, or seated under its gloomiest trees. Even her child she seldom saw: it was left almost entirely to Bridget. She now inhabited only a portion of the front pile of the abbey—that lying between the great entrance-gates and the south tower—and her household was a small one. The rest of the numerous servants remained, doing nothing; they were the lord's retainers, and awaited his coming home.

When news of the dire calamity, resulting in Guy's death and his own succession, reached India and George Pomeroy, he lost no time in writing back and appointing an agent, or steward, to act for him until he should return. This was

John Gaunt, the gentleman-keeper. Captain Pomeroy endowed him with absolute power and authority: in the abbey and out of it he was to be the unquestioned master. Gaunt, as time went on, proved to be a most courteous and considerate one.

The new Lord of Pomeroy did not show himself in any hurry to return and take up his honours. After the lapse of twelve months, or so, Joan wrote to ask the reason why. She did not like the abbey to be without its lord, Mrs. Pomeroy acting as though she were its mistress. In reply to his sister, George said that there were rumours of war in India, and he did not care to quit the army at such a time. This answer vexed the Pomeroyes: Joan especially. She had her own opinion about the matter.

"I know why he will not come: the true reason," she remarked one day petulantly to Henry Capel.

"What is it?"

"George was always chivalrously considerate to other people's feelings. He stays away out of delicacy to the poor wanderer, Rupert."

Mr. Capel could not understand. "What do you mean, Joan?" he asked.

"In the ordinary course of things Rupert would have inherited after Guy," she continued. "As it is, he was passed over for George. George feels that; and he will not, in deference to Rupert's feelings, assume his rights as Lord of Pomeroy."

Henry Capel drew in his lips. "Strange reasoning, Joan. One would almost think you yourself wish to show deference to that unhappy man."

"No. But you don't know George. The more miserable a person is, the more cautious he would be not to tread upon his feelings. He will stay where he is for a year or two."

And it seemed likely that George would do so, for the "year or two" went by and brought no change. John Gaunt remained in sole power, and never a word had any one to say against him. Mrs. Pomeroy he treated with the utmost consideration and respect, deferring to her in all matters that properly concerned her. The world had

turned its cold shoulder upon her, but Gaunt would not let her know that he perceived it. Only once did her wishes clash with his. She suddenly issued orders, some twelve months after her husband's death, for throwing open, cleansing, and renovating the west wing, and for barring-up the west tower. The servants, as in duty-bound, carried the orders to Mr. Gaunt, and he at once countermanded them. He waited on Mrs. Pomeroy, and told her he was unable to sanction the order without the consent of the lord. "Write to him for it," said Mrs. Pomeroy, curtly, evidently not pleased at the refusal.

Gaunt wrote. The answer was received from India as speedily as mail could bring it. It forbade the west wing to be meddled with in any way; neither that nor the tower was to be touched: and a peremptory command to Gaunt was added—to keep the wing locked up, as he had hitherto kept it, and not to permit it to be entered on any pretext whatsoever.

"The new lord has all the Pomeroy superstition upon him," quoth the gossips when they heard this. "He won't have things, up in that wing, altered."

Mrs. Pomeroy was fain to accept the decision. No other choice was left her. A shrewd suspicion lay upon her, she hardly knew whence derived, that Gaunt possessed the power to turn her from the abbey if he saw it fitting to do so: surely, as her conscience told her, she had forfeited the right to insist upon remaining in it if the family should choose to put her forth. During all this time Rupert was still free: he had not been found. A general belief existed that he must have made good his escape to some remote portion of the globe, and was there concealing himself.

The time continued to pass on with little event to mark its progress. George did not return; Rupert made no sign. A question would now and again arise in the minds of his relatives—was Rupert dead? It could not be answered. A report had reached Europe that George had married. It was not confirmed; and his own family scornfully repudiated it, calling it gossip. The Lord of Pomeroy was not one to marry privately, without sending proper cre-

dentials home ; a wife of his could not hide her head under a bushel.

But George's non-return began seriously to vex his family. Joan especially resented it. Never was such a thing heard of yet, as for the Lord of Pomeroy to live away from his own domains. To all the letters of remonstrance written to him, George sent back the same good-humoured (and somewhat careless) answer—that, they were certainly on the eve of war in India, and he did not like to withdraw in the face of it.

At length, when five years, and somewhat more, had elapsed from the time of his accession, Joan grew downright impatient : indignant, perhaps, might be the better word. She wrote George a severe letter about the duty he owed to Pomeroy, and the obligation that lay upon him to come home without further delay and enter upon his inheritance.

Alas, George Pomeroy never did come home to enter upon it. Before Joan's letter reached the shores of India, war had indeed broken out there, and George fell on the battle-field. It was too true. Tidings of the sad event arrived, bringing deep sorrow, for all the world had liked George Pomeroy. Never had it been known for one of the lords to die away from his own domains (as Joan had remarked with reference to the living away), and the abbey mourned that fact as freely as they mourned the dead. Once more the death-flag waved over the entrance-gates ; masses for the repose of the soul were said in the chapel.

And the youngest of the four sons, Leolin, succeeded as Lord of Pomeroy.

PART THE SECOND,

CHAPTER I.

AT THE DUCHESS OF ST. IVES'.

It was the height of the London season. The night sky above was studded with its stars, as the starry beauties of this lower hemisphere were pressing into one of the greatest and most exclusive houses of the day.

It was the town-house of the Duchess of St. Ives, a wealthy widow, only two-and-forty yet, and still beautiful. She had ruled the world long on her own account, and now she was ruling it in right of her son. It was the first season he had spent in London since coming of age, and the world was going mad after him. Mothers courted him openly, daughters covertly: for young ladies in those days had not learnt to enter upon courtship for themselves unblushingly: a great thing it would be to be Duchess of St. Ives.

A well-appointed carriage dashed into the rank, and struggled its way to the door. The Countess of Essington descended from it with daughters three. Yes, the majestic countess, as important in her own eyes, and daring in her own actions, as the Duchess of St. Ives in hers, had brought them all; the Ladies Mabel, Geraldine, and Anna Hetley. Mabel and Geraldine were like their mother, stately girls with handsome features, but cold as though they had been carved in Parian marble. Anna was different; she had nothing of majesty or of marble about her: a fair, graceful girl, with soft, merry blue eyes, that drooped beneath their long lashes when gazed into, a dimpled, lovely face, and a pretty mouth too much given to laughing, and displaying unconsciously its set of white pearls.

A moment's respite after the reception, and the countess and her daughters were but so many of the brilliant crowd

that thronged the rooms. Lady Anna found herself seated next to a young lady with whom they were on terms of close intimacy.

"Have *you* come to-night, Anna? Three of you? What an idea!"

"There was no help for it," laughed Anna. "This is the ball of the season, you know, and Mabel and Geraldine would not give up their privilege as elders. I don't know whether mamma would really have brought me, but the duke called this afternoon, and began talking to me about to-night, wanting to make me promise—oh, I don't know what—to give him two dances to everybody else's one, and all that sort of nonsense. You should have seen his face when I told him I was not coming. Off he went to mamma, and said—— I did not listen, but the result is, that I am here."

The young lady-listener sat playing with her drooping bracelet. "Anna, there need not be any more heart-burnings after the duke: we may all resign him at once with a good grace, for we shall have to do it. You are in luck."

"In what way?" cried Anna, quickly.

"To have gained him. You might be Duchess of St. Ives to-morrow."

"Might I? Nothing of the sort. I will turn him over to you: or to Mabel."

"You know you might be: and you know you will be. Here he comes, true to his allegiance. And now it is good-bye to you for the rest of the evening, I suppose."

Lady Anna glanced towards the Duke of St. Ives. He was threading his way to her with difficulty, for he was detained on all sides by the gentlewomen who were angling for him with their subtle lines. "It will take him twenty minutes to get here," laughed Anna.

"What a lovely bouquet!" suddenly exclaimed the young lady, observing the flowers for the first time. "Who supplied it?"

"How can I tell?" returned Anna, with downcast eyes and conscious cheek. "It was sent to me just before we left home."

"He has taste in flowers, at any rate, if these were arranged under his guidance."

"Who has taste?"

"Who! You can afford this pretty affectation of unconsciousness, now you are sure of him. St. Ives."

"But I am not sure of him," again laughed Anna. "And I am not sure—indeed, I don't think—that he sent me the bouquet. Another came, less beautiful: 'That charming one is the duke's,' cried mamma. 'Take that one, Anna:' and I obeyed, saying nothing, but I fancied the other was his."

"The duke would send only one?"

"Of course not."

"Who sent the other?"

"How can I tell?" returned Lady Anna. "Is not all the world dying to send bouquets to me?" she added, with pretty sauciness. Anna Hetley was in unusual spirits to-night.

The Duke of St. Ives reached her at length, and took her away with him. He was tall; too tall and too slender; altogether very much like a maypole, with a fair complexion, mild eyes, and a meek, inoffensive face. At Eton he was called "Milky," and had never lost the soubriquet. "St. Ives is a milksop still, he has no devil in him," sneered sometimes the fast young men, his friends, who had rather too much of it in themselves.

The quadrille was walked through, a waltz was danced. Other dances with other partners came, in their turn; and, just as Anna was enjoying a moment's respite in a sheltered corner, another gentleman came up to her, who had only then entered. Not above the middle height, he was yet a distinguished-looking man, his hair of a dark brown shade, his grey eyes clear, and his features very fine.

"Anna," he whispered, in a low, musical voice, whose tones spoke love, if ever love was spoken—"Anna!"

She started and blushed vividly, for she had not seen him advancing. "Oh, Leolin!"

"Did you think I was lost?"

"I thought you were never coming. Why are you so late?"

"And I am only here now to tell you I cannot come—if that is not Irish. Stanton—you know Stanton?"

"Yes: a little."

"Well, poor fellow, he has met with an accident to-night, through the bursting of a gun. I was starting to come here when they sent for me: he is in great pain, in shocking spirits, and cannot bear me to leave him. I told him he must give me half-an-hour—and I came here to tell you about it."

"I am so sorry. How—— Here comes St. Ives again," she broke off, in a hurried whisper. "Say I am engaged to you, Leolin."

The Duke of St. Ives received his answer, and the other looked at his watch. "I must stay for this one waltz, Anna: the temptation is not to be resisted."

She put her arm within his, and his eyes happened to fall upon the flowers. "They are well arranged, Anna, are they not?"

"I knew they came from you," she breathed softly. "This bouquet and another were left. Mamma jumped to the conclusion that the more beautiful one must be from the duke, and ordered me to use it. His lies neglected on the table at home."

"Anna, I shall begin to fear that the duke is dangerous," he said, as he held her, somewhat closer than he need have done, in the whirling waltz.

She smiled and half shook her head, but her shy, pretty eyes were bent to the ground; otherwise he might have seen how full of love they were.

"And now I must not linger another moment," he exclaimed, when the dance was over. "Poor Stanton!"

"Leolin, I don't believe you have spoken a single word to any one else in the room!"

"I don't think I have: St. Ives excepted. I looked for his mother when I came in, and could not see her."

"I was very nearly not coming, Leolin. We are three of us, you know—and had Lucy not married she would have made four. The duke called to-day and talked to mamma, and made her promise to bring me."

"You should contrive to give the duke a hint. Good-night, my dearest."

He left her sitting where she was, and quitted the room. Anna's eyes followed him. She saw him step aside to greet the duchess, saw him turn at the door to give herself a last look. With his departure, the evening's happiness had gone out for her.

"I never heard anything like it!" uttered Lady Anna Hetley, as she stood before her mother the next morning, with flushed cheeks. "How stupid he must be!"

"Stupid?" echoed the countess.

"Was such a thing ever heard of, mamma? As if he could not have waited till a proper time and season! And what in the world took papa there last night? I don't think he has troubled a ball for years."

"Is anything the matter with Anna?" exclaimed Lady Geraldine, who had entered whilst her sister was speaking.

"A piece of good fortune is the matter with her," returned the countess. "St. Ives spoke to your papa last night about her."

"Has he made her an offer?" breathlessly returned Geraldine.

"Yes. I knew it was coming."

"And what is she grumbling at?"

"We always do things by the rules of contrary," cried the countess, shrugging her shoulders. "The more happiness is rained upon us, the more we grumble. Discontent is indigenous to England."

"But think of the stupid way in which he went to work," retorted Anna: "never to give me a hint of what he was about to do, but to go blundering off to papa! And to speak to him in his own ball-room, at his own house! I wonder papa listened to him."

"What did it matter where he spoke to him?"

"It matters this—that he ought to have told me first, and not have broken it to papa without my knowledge."

"You must have seen what was coming——"

"What is the matter?"

The interruption came from Lady Mabel. She and Geraldine had lain in bed late, as in fact had Lady Essington, and so made their first appearance in a desultory manner when the day was advanced.

"Only that Anna is an idiot," exclaimed Geraldine, in answer to her sister's question. "Yes, Anna; I repeat that you must have known what was coming. He had flirted enough with you."

"There's the evil of it," cried Anna. "Men are so much given to flirting nowadays, that you cannot tell what is flirting and what is reality: and woe to the feelings of any girl who mistakes the false for the genuine. If the Duke of St. Ives has flirted with me—though I hate the word, and I have *not* encouraged him—others have flirted with him. Some of you girls have been ready to pull him to pieces in the contest."

"Mamma, just listen to her—she says she has not encouraged him!" exclaimed Mabel, with a smile.

"I have not encouraged him more than I could help," said Anna. "When he has talked to me, I have answered him; when he has asked me to dance, I have not said No. I like talking, and I like dancing. Was it my place to assume that he was only paving the way to ask me to marry him?"

"You have worked for it, though, in your quiet way," retorted Mabel, who was saying all this out of sheer vexation that the prize should have escaped herself.

"Indeed, I have not," spoke Anna, earnestly. "He has always sought me, and I could not avoid that; but I have *not* encouraged him."

Mabel retorted. "Only last night you went to his house, taking the flowers he left for you."

A smile crossed Anna's face. "Well, it is done, and it cannot be undone," she rejoined; "but I must repeat, that he has acted as—as only one gifted with as little brains as the Duke of St. Ives could act."

"What do you mean is done, and can't be undone?"

"His speaking to papa. And I say he has no sense, to have been so premature."

Lady Essington lifted her hand in warning. "Take care, young lady, that you don't show these airs before him; or he may think twice before completing the bargain. And here he is—he said he should call early."

But the footsteps ascending the stairs were not the duke's. They were those of the gentleman with whom Anna had snatched a waltz the previous night, during the brief period of his stay in the crowded rooms. The servant threw wide the door:

"Mr. Pomeroy."

Mr. Pomeroy was not the Duke of St. Ives; and some little disappointment may have been felt by Lady Essington. But if so, it was momentary, for Mr. Pomeroy was also a favoured visitor. He told them of the painful accident to his friend Stanton: a young man who was attached like himself to one of the embassies abroad, and was just now over here on leave.

Before he had quite finished the recital, the old Dowager Faulcot came in with her two nieces; intimate friends of the Essingtons, who might call early or late. Lady Faulcot began a tale of scandal more interesting in its way than the gun accident to Stanton. In the midst of it Anna escaped to the conservatory, and was followed by Mr. Pomeroy.

"Leolin, he has asked for me!" she exclaimed, when they were sheltered in that retreat, and beyond the ears in the drawing-room.

"St. Ives?"

"Oh yes. He spoke to papa last night—actually in his own ball-rooms. If he had only spoken to me, I could have given him an answer quietly, and there would have been an end to him, and no one need have been the wiser. I am not sure that it is honourable to tell you this, Leolin; but—
—papa accepted him."

Leolin Pomeroy's brow flushed, for he loved her with a passionate love: but the pride of his race rose within him. Mr. Pomeroy, secure in his descent of untold generations, afraid of the new Duke of St. Ives, whose ancestors, seventy years ago, were of the people! Anna glanced at him.

timidly, her lovely eyes full of tears. He drew her to him, and bent down his face with a tender whisper.

"Which shall it be?—the Duke of St. Ives, or Leolin Pomeroy?"

"Oh, Leolin, why do you ask me? You know."

"Is your father at home?" he inquired between his kisses. "Can he be seen?"

"Would you ask him now, Leolin!"

"Now. Before I leave the house. You must be my promised wife this day, love, if you would not be his."

They drew apart hurriedly, for voices broke on their ears, ominously near. Lady Essington and the dowager and the rest came in view, perhaps to see what the young people might be doing. They saw Anna seated on a large flower-pot turned upside down, training the refractory branches of a rare plant with a refractory name, and Mr. Pomeroy ungallantly standing with his back to her, lost in contemplation of the wonderful American aloe, which blossomed but once in a century.

Lady Faulcot's sight was keen, and her imagination lively. "You should have your eyes about you," cried she confidentially to the countess. "Anna is just at the age that she may have her head turned; and he does not want for attractions, that young Pomeroy."

"My dear dowager, Anna is safe. She marries St. Ives."

"Eh? Who says so?" ejaculated the dowager.

"He proposed for her to the earl yesterday. It is all settled."

"Pity the rest of the girls, then!" cried Lady Faulcot. "What will they do?—they are all dying to be her grace of St. Ives. Is it true that young Stanton has shot his head off?" continued she, passing further on between the plants, and addressing Leolin Pomeroy.

"Not his head, madam. One of his ears and part of his hand."

"What careless simpletons you young men are, to get toying with guns! I would rather play with a wild hyena, for my part."

"There was a flaw in it," said Leolin. "Bishop——"

"Oh, of course. That's sure to be the tale—Bishop, Bishop! He's always in fault; never your own awkwardness. Anna, we are to congratulate you, I hear. Take care, child, that you don't receive a stray shot yourself. When this news is known, there are some would give you one if they dared."

"What news?" asked Anna, unconsciously.

"That you have accepted St. Ives. All the girls wanted him, you know."

"Is the earl at home?" quietly demanded Leolin of Lady Essington.

"I believe he is in his study. Do you want him?"

"I will go to his study," said he.

The Dowager Lady Faulecot took her departure with her train: but not before Anna had whispered a word to her that her congratulations were premature—of which the old lady believed as much as she chose. Not long after that, Anna heard the study bell ring, and Mr. Pomeroy was shown out. Then came a message to Lady Essington: the earl wanted her in his study. Mabel and Geraldine followed their mother out of the room, but not to the study; and this left Anna alone.

She was alone when the next caller was shown in—the Duke of St. Ives. The young duke, seizing the favourable opportunity, repeated in person the offer he had made to her father the previous night. Anna, very much distressed now that it had come to a point, refused him, kindly but firmly.

"This cannot be your final decision!" exclaimed the young man, displaying emotion.

"It is indeed."

"But why have you suffered me to hope?"

"Nay," said Lady Anna, "I have not suffered it: at least, not willingly. What have I done to encourage hope? How could I have acted otherwise? You have been pleased to single me out, rather more perhaps than you have other girls, but I shrank from your attentions instead of——"

"It was that shrinking from me that won me," interrupted the simple-hearted duke; "it was indeed."

"I am very sorry: but I cannot see that I am to blame. I could not speak to you before you first spoke to me. I could not dare to assume that you were about to propose to me, without being sure of it."

The duke allowed that: but he grew hot and somewhat incoherent in his disappointment.

"Anna, can you not say that you—will let it wait for a time, and think of it?"

"Oh no, I cannot; it must not wait a day. I can never say otherwise than I do now."

The duke nervously pulled his glove about. "I would try to make you so happy: I would not have a will but yours."

Anna was nervous also: it was her first attempt at a refusal. She stammered out that he was very kind; very good.

"I'm sure I thought you liked me."

"And I do like you, very much indeed," she answered, in the candour of her heart. "But not—not in that way. I like you very much better than any of the other young men we know. Except—except perhaps one or two," she lamely added, with a blush.

"I fear you love some one else, Lady Anna."

The blush deepened. Her face was a picture of confusion.

"I see how it is," he whispered. "I have been indulging a foolish hope—and it had no foundation. I trust you will forgive me."

"We can be friends still," she answered earnestly, glancing almost appealingly at him through her tears, for few natures were more true and tender than Anna Hetley's. "Please believe that I would not willingly have deceived you."

"I do; I do believe you. It has been my fault—my mistake."

"If you had only spoken one little word to me—but, as I say, I could not speak to you," she timidly repeated, feeling, in her concern and sympathy, that she had unwittingly inflicted some cruel woe upon him. The duke prepared to leave.

"I shall never care for any one else, Anna."

He nervously put out his hand, then drew it back, then put it out again. The young duke did not know what might be the etiquette on these occasions. Anna knew as little; but she frankly put her hand into his—and pressed it: some vague idea running through her mind that it might soften the blow.

The duke sighed. "I think the next best thing to having you—will be to have your sister," he observed, deliberating with himself. "If I cannot be your husband, it will be something to be your brother. I don't love her, it's true; but I shall never love any one now."

The candid avowal, and the rueful tone it was made in, changed the current of Anna's feelings. She almost laughed.

"Oh yes; that would be delightful, if you could only fancy one of them. Which of them do you mean, Mabel or Geraldine?"

"Well, I don't know," said the duke; "I have not thought about it. I must talk to my mother. Good-bye."

Shaking her hand again, he quitted the room, and was out of the house quickly. Anna, inexpressibly relieved in more ways than one, hummed a merry waltz, and danced round and round the room.

Lady Essington had found her husband waiting for her in his study. A little man, wearing a black velvet cap on the top of his head, and a flowery chintz dressing-gown: a merry-hearted little man, who liked to take things pleasantly.

"Did you send Pomeroy to me?" he asked.

"I told him you were here. Why?"

"Then you don't know what he wants?"

"How should I know? To talk about Stanton, perhaps."

"He wants Anna."

The countess questioned with her eyes and lips. "Wants her for what?"

"To be his wife."

"What a donkey he must be!" uttered the lady, irascibly.

"Why, the old Dowager of Barham let it out to him that she was going to marry St. Ives."

"But is she going to marry St. Ives?"

"What should prevent her?" retorted the countess.

"She may like some one else better. Mr. Pomeroy says she does."

"I wish Mr. Pomeroy had been buried in the Pomeroy vaults before he had come upsetting things in this way!" was the intemperate rejoinder of Lady Essington. "There's not such a match in all England as St. Ives; if Anna were to refuse him I would never forgive her. Besides, she can't do so now: that prating old dowager is off to tell it to all London."

The earl laughed: he enjoyed the joke. "You and the dowager must settle it between you," said he. "I suppose you told her first. But, if Anna has Mr. Pomeroy in her head, she can't marry St. Ives."

Lady Essington scowled. "Would you let her marry Pomeroy, with St. Ives in the way?"

"I would let her marry Pomeroy with St. Ives in the way, or out of it," returned the good-natured earl. "When young people take mutual likings, of what use standing out against them. Had there been anything objectionable in Pomeroy, any cause against his wooing her, why did you suffer them to meet? Here has he been continually in the house, like a tame cat. Not that I complain of it: I like the young fellow."

"I have allowed him to come in, like a tame cat, as you elegantly express it, because I hoped he would take a fancy to Geraldine," was the answer, sharply spoken. "I am sure it is to Geraldine he has chiefly talked."

"When he has talked aloud," put in Lord Essington, with another laugh. "I always thought it was Anna, and so I tell you. They were for ever together when we were abroad; you know that, Lucinda. I saw them last night, whispering, and twirling about in that brainless dance, that's only good for making the head reel and the heart faint."

"My daughters have been too properly reared to allow themselves to become foolishly attached," said she loftily.

"But nature's nature," cried the earl.

"And training's training," retorted the countess. "What if they did see each other sometimes abroad?—he was nothing but a younger son then, and had no more hope of coming into the Pomeroy estates than I had."

"He says she loves him; and he says he ardently loves her," was the only answer the earl gave to this. "I believe he does."

"Love!" rejoined my lady, scornfully. "Love must give place to expediency. "Did he speak of the duke?"

"Yes, he did," replied the earl, laughing. "He called him names: the bran' new Brummagem duke!"

Lady Essington's eyes flashed fire. "Shameful! How dared he?"

"Dared? Oh, come! These men with long pedigrees (we are not very old ourselves, you know, Lucinda) do hold new people in contempt. In point of descent, the Duke of St. Ives is not worthy to buckle on the garter of Leolin Pomeroy."

Lady Essington's rejoinder was arrested. She heard the duke's voice upon the stairs; and, opening the door, saw him passing along the hall. He was departing after his interview with Anna. Lady Essington hastened to accost him; but the duke, ever so far on then, looked back with a cold bow, and was gone.

"She has refused him!" exclaimed the countess, sinking into a chair. "I'd lay all I am worth, that she has refused him. And I never knew he was here! And that old dowager will have gone round the town proclaiming the engagement! If Anna has been so great an idiot, I think I shall lock her up!"

She bent her angry and hasty steps to the drawing-room, and caught my young Lady Anna in the midst of her waltzing. Arresting her by the arm, she turned her round the other way; not very gently.

"What have you been doing to the Duke of St. Ives?"

"Mamma! how you startled me!"

"What have you been doing to the Duke of St. Ives?"

"Oh, please don't be angry!" implored Anna. "I only told the duke I could not marry him."

"You wicked girl! Not marry him! Not marry St. Ives! Mabel, come here," interrupted the countess, hearing Lady Mabel enter the room; "look at your sister there! She has been refusing St. Ives."

"You have not?" debated Mabel, slowly, speaking to Anna. "You are not quite a fool, *au fond*."

"Such a fuss!" cried Anna, goaded into rebellion. "Who's St. Ives? Leolin Pomeroy calls him——"

"Be still, you shameless child!" interrupted the countess. "How dare you mention Pomeroy to my face?—after sending him to your papa with a tale that you had fallen in love with him, and he with you!"

Anna stood with blushing cheeks and fallen eyelids. They might read in her face that it was no fable, the love existing between her and Leolin.

"Mabel, he called St. Ives a bran' new Brummagem duke, or some such vulgarisin; and—and——" Lady Essington hardly knew whether to subside into hysterics, or to shake Anna—"your father takes his part; says he shall have her."

"He is Leolin Pomeroy," observed Anna, in low tones. "But for the Duke of St. Ives wanting me, mamma, you would never have thought of objecting to him."

"Right, child," exclaimed the earl, who had come in now, and was ready to burst with suppressed laughter. "I say if they had not wanted you to have young Pomeroy, he should not have been allowed to come here."

"Well, papa," cried Mabel, sharply, "I never thought you would have upheld Anna in such conduct."

"What conduct?" asked the earl.

"She has encouraged the duke shamefully; no one else has had a chance with him; and I do say that to turn round upon him now is not good behaviour. Only last night, she went parading his bouquet in his rooms."

Lord Essington, for all his good nature, had as keen a sense of what was right and wrong as other people. His face wore a displeased look as he turned to Anna. She bit her lips to hide a smile.

"Two bouquets came for me, papa. The one was a beauty, and mamma ordered me to use it."

"But you had no right to use it," screamed the countess, "if you meant to reject the duke to-day."

"But it was not the duke's," returned Anna; "the duke's was the one we left at home. The one I took was sent to me by Leolin Pomeroy."

A pause. They were taking in the sense of the treason.

"You deceitful little——" began her mother. But the earl burst into a hearty laugh, which drowned the rest of the reproach.

Leolin Pomeroy, unlike his brother George, had lost no time in assuming his new honours, as head of his house. Resigning his diplomatic post at once, he hastened to London, made a flying visit to the abbey, and then went back to London again, all within a week. His attraction was the Lady Anna Hetley, whom he had met and seen a great deal of abroad. He had not dared to hope for her when he was a nameless, obscure attaché: but he meant to have her now that he reigned at Pomeroy.

CHAPTER II.

LADY ANNA.

"WHAT slur is it that lies on the Pomeroy escutcheon? I am almost sure there is one."

The question was put by Lady Geraldine; and her mother at once began to ransack her memory. She fancied she had heard of something disagreeable that happened in the family a few years ago. The Essingtons had not been intimate with the Pomeroy's: the eldest daughter, Lucy, had once, when staying with some people in the same county, been taken to the abbey on a short visit. Lucy was married now, and lived in Ireland. Last year, during a stay the Essingtons had made on the Continent, they had seen a good deal of the young attaché. He was plain and poor Leolin.

Pomeroiy then. He was the reigning lord now: but it was most unreasonable of him to come after Anna when the Duke of St. Ives wanted her. Lady Essington was not a woman to give up her way or her will without a fight for it. She had set her heart upon marrying Anna to the duke, who could hardly count his riches, and she did not choose to be frustrated by the (comparatively speaking) poor Lord of Pomeroiy. This suggestion of Geraldine's was, therefore, as welcome to her as gold; for, if there was a hole in the Pomeroiy coat, it was clearly her duty to find it out. Should it prove to be a large one, she might make it a pretext for declining the alliance.

Down, on the spur of the moment, as soon as she had swallowed her luncheon, went Lady Essington to Lincoln's Inn, to the offices of that noted firm of solicitors, Hildyard and Prael. Rather to the annoyance, it must be owned, of her two elder daughters, who had wanted to secure the carriage for some expedition of their own. Mr. Hildyard chanced to be disengaged, and she was at once shown into his private room.

It was not the first conference that Lady Essington had held in that room: a small compartment softly carpeted, with a large light window, and walls that seemed to be made of deed-boxes. Her husband had a great deal of trouble with their only son, the spendthrift Viscount Cardine, necessitating many consultations and much arrangement with the lawyers, and her ladyship liked to have, herself, a finger in the pie. Mr Hildyard was one of the wealthiest, most upright, and renowned solicitors in London: quite a gentleman of the old school, and a Roman Catholic. As a matter of course, his practice lay chiefly with those who held the same faith, amongst whom were the Essingtons and the Pomeroy's.

As Lady Essington entered, he rose from his seat: an elderly, neat, silent man, dressed in black with a white shirt-frill—a mode of attire not unusual for lawyers in those days. His face was fair, his light eyes were calm, and on the top of his head, getting bald now, lay a sprinkling of powder.

"Well, and what can I do for you to-day!" he asked, when greetings had passed, and he had placed Lady Essington in a seat and resumed his own at his table. "Any fresh complication for Lord Cayline?"

"No, no, nothing of that sort," she impatiently interrupted, waving her hand as if she would wave away the subject his question touched upon, and the trouble it invariably suggested. "I have come to ask what you know of the Pomeroy's of Pomeroy."

Mr. Hildyard did not immediately answer. He sat, as he often did sit, with his right hand inside his waistcoat, lying across the cambric frill of his shirt.

"I think there is some blot on their escutcheon," she continued. "I want to know what it is."

"There is no blot on their escutcheon, to my knowledge, Lady Essington," spoke Mr. Hildyard now. "Unless you allude to the fatal quarrel which took place between the lord and his brother Rupert, resulting in the former's death."

"*That's it*," spoke Lady Essington quickly. "I remember now—and how disgracefully the young wife was mixed up with it. One brother killed the other."

"Yes, they quarrelled, and—and there was a fatal struggle."

"I wish you would relate the particulars."

Mr. Hildyard entered upon the recital—giving the heads of the story briefly. He cast no blame on any one: lawyers are cautious: not even upon the young Lady of Pomeroy. But Lady Essington, her memory thus refreshed, was recalling the details of the story as they recurred to her. The lord's wife was said to favour his handsome brother Rupert, and a quarrel took place: a scuffle, in which the elder was killed: she remembered that now. Mr. Hildyard assented. Yes, he said, a pistol went off and it shot the lord; and Rupert had made good his escape. It was evident to Lady Essington that the lawyer spoke very unwillingly indeed: and but for her own shrewd questioning she would have learnt next to nothing.

"The late lord, George, never came home to enter on his inheritance," observed Mr. Hildyard, passing from the

quarrel to a more legitimate portion of the subject. "He would have come shortly, had he not died—as I have reason to know from his letters to me."

"Yes, he died," assented Lady Essington: "and that brought the attaché, Leolin, Lord of Pomeroy. Well now, should you not consider that that fatal quarrel reflects a lasting disgrace on Leolin Pomeroy?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Hildyard, more warmly than he generally spoke. "Leolin Pomeroy stands as pure from disgrace, in my opinion, as poor Guy stood when he succeeded his father. It would be a cruel thing, madam, if one brother must be held responsible for the ill-doing of another. That is a creed which I hope will never obtain amongst Englishmen."

"I didn't say he was to be held responsible; I said the matter reflected disgrace on him," retorted my lady. "And so it does."

"And so it does not—as I think all just men would say. Pardon me, Lady Essington: you asked my opinion, and I have given it. Leolin Pomeroy stands as high as a young man of noble character can stand."

"He has shown himself a very deceitful man in my house; I can tell you that. Downright wicked."

Mr. Hildyard opened his eyes. "Deceitful? wicked?"

"Why, yes: he has come and made love, under the rose, to my daughter Anna. He wants to marry her."

A smile crossed the lawyer's lips. "I see," he observed. "That is his offence, is it? And—pardon me—why should he not marry Lady Anna?"

"Because I wish her to marry some one else."

"It is a good position—that of Lady of Pomeroy; and the rent-roll is now free. A position not to be despised even by one of your daughters, Lady Essington."

"But he has fixed upon the wrong daughter, don't you see: Anna might be Duchess of St. Ives to-morrow. Pomeroy might have had either of the other two, and welcome."

"And what does Lady Anna say?"

"Say—ungrateful little monkey!—says she'll have Pomeroy and not St. Ives. Her father upholds her."

"Oh," responded Mr. Hildyard. "Well, I don't know much of the duke, but he seems to me rather an empty-headed young fellow. I should prefer Leolin Pomeroy myself."

"Why, you are as bad as the earl! What did he say to my face this morning, that husband of mine?—that the duke was not fit to buckle on the garters of the Lords of Pomeroy."

"He spoke of their descent, I assume," observed Mr. Hildyard shrewdly. "Descent goes for something, madam."

"I would rather have money," she retorted, candidly. "But I suppose it is of no use taking up your time any longer."

The lawyer rose. "I assure you, Lady Essington, that I know nothing against the honour of Leolin Pomeroy. Or against that of the Pomeroy family, if we except that fatal quarrel."

But Lady Essington, as she drove back to Perkeley Square, still thought there *was* something else, though she was unable to recall what. The probability was, that rumours of that old tale, touching the "wicked lord," had at some time or other reached her ears and might be floating indistinctly in her brain.

"You might have spared yourself the visit, mamma," were the words Geraldine accosted her with as she entered. "Old Mrs. Knox has been here and told us all about it. The late Lord of Pomeroy killed his brother."

"The brother killed the late lord," corrected Lady Essington. "And we must all have bad memories to forget it. It was done in a scuffle."

"Mrs. Knox called it murder."

"Old Hildyard called it a scuffle. But he is as close as wax. It was not the late lord, however, Geraldine. That was George, who has recently died, and who never came home at all."

"It was Guy: the one that Lucy knew; and what a creature that wife of his must have been! Mrs. Knox says the inquest brought it in wilful murder, and the brother who did it is being looked for still. Any way, whether killing or murder, it was altogether disreputable."

"Most disreputable," warmly assented Lady Essington.
"Where's Anna?"

"Papa called her down to the study," crossly answered Geraldine, who was often in a temper the reverse of amiable, and was especially so to-day. She had had private hopes herself of Leolin Pomeroy: and now he had cast upon her the unpardonable slight of passing her over for her younger sister.

The countess hastened to the study to see what treason might be hatching. Once that simple husband of hers, who had as little notion of the social proprieties of life as an owl, and that simple Anna, who had less, got plotting together without herself to keep them in order, there was no guessing at the result.

"Anna, are your affections fixed upon Leolin Pomeroy?" began the earl, in his simple, straightforward way, when he had called her down to his study and closed the door.

Anna's cheeks grew crimson. She turned to the window, which had an agreeable view of a small back yard, to screen them.

"Or upon the Duke of St. Ives?"

She glanced up at him now. "Oh, papa, no! I don't care for the duke. I only like him as a friend; I could not be his wife. And—and——"

"And what? Speak freely, my dear. This is a solemn subject."

"I thought also that a union with the duke would not be quite suitable for me. We are not of the same faith."

"True. But so many intermarriages take place now that—at any rate, your mother sees no objection. We will pass that question. I only wish to give you a word of advice, Anna: before deciding irrevocably, make sure that you know your own mind. The young men are both desirable; I like them much. Pomeroy has the advantage in lineage, St. Ives in wealth: not but that, in my opinion, Pomeroy is quite sufficiently rich. The wife of the Duke of St. Ives, let him marry whom he may, will be mistress and master; he will make a kind, docile, obedient husband. The Lords of Pomeroy, on the contrary, have the reputation of liking to rule their wives with an imperative will."

Tears stood in her eyes as she looked up. "Papa, I could not respect or love a man who would yield his will to mine in great things. I must be able to reverence my husband, to find him one that I can obey: and I am certain that Leolin will ever love me and be good to me."

"Be it so, then," said the earl, as he kissed her forehead. "Long life and happiness to you, my dear, as the wife of Leolin Pomeroy!"

It was at this critical juncture that Lady Essington interrupted them, her bonnet on, her shawl not unfastened, just as she had come in from Mr. Hildyard's. When she found that her husband had weakly given his promise to Anna, her indignation was unbounded.

"Why, you must be out of your mind, Lord Essington! Think of the duke's wealth!"

"Wealth! Oh, he has a good deal of that. More money than brains." And my young Lady Anna, being so far wanting in reverence as to laugh, her mother tapped her arm sharply.

"I have a great mind to shake you, you undutiful child. Who is he, that Leolin Pomeroy, beside the Duke of St. Ives? The other day he was only a miserable attaché."

"But, mamma, he is owner of Pomeroy now."

"Owner of fiddlestick! Have you reflected what it is to be a duchess, and to be richer than almost every other woman in London?"

"I should not know what to do with so much," said Anna, simply. "Besides, the duke is not of our faith."

"What of that? He would not interfere with your faith, or you with his. I dare say you might have the honour of converting him in the first twelvemonth."

"I should not try to convert him," said Anna. "I am not clever enough for that. And I think good people like to keep to the faith in which they have been reared—if they do their duty in it."

"Oh, indeed," spoke the countess, sarcastically, while the earl nodded approval at Anna. "How highly ridiculous you are! You could let his faith alone if you chose."

"But I should not like it at all," pleaded Anna. "I

should not like for my husband to worship in one church, and I in another."

She seemed quite excited; her fingers were interlaced, tears were in her eyes. Lord Essington fondly laid his hand upon her head to reassure her.

"And indeed, mamma, for these reasons and others, I *cannot* marry the Duke of St. Ives. Papa has been so kind as to say that he does not object to Leolin Pomeroy: if you object, why, I must remain unmarried. I could never have any one but Leolin."

"There, there," said the earl, soothingly. "I've said it, and I'll stick to it. Leolin Pomeroy is quite rich enough for you and me, Anna; and your mother would have thought him so, but for St. Ives. You be off upstairs, my dear, and tell Pomeroy I say so. He has just gone up, I fancy: I told him he might call for his answer this afternoon."

"*You* have done a pretty thing!" snapped my lady, as Anna escaped. "Letting the best match in the world go out of the family!"

"One can't be always wise," smiled the earl, good-humouredly. "I am not going to have my children made unhappy for all the matches in Christendom."

"You'd rather see them old maids. I know that."

"I don't know but I'd as soon see them old maids, as not," he avowed. "Marriage is all a lottery. But that's not the present question. I don't myself understand how Anna is to be an old maid if she marries Leolin Pomeroy."

"You always were aggravating, you know, Essington."

"I really don't know it: I did not think I was," he answered, still smiling. "I confess, looking at the matter with my eyes, Pomeroy seems to be an exceedingly suitable match, ay, and a good match, for any of the girls. I say you would have thought so yourself, Lucinda, but for getting St. Ives on the brain."

"I have not got St. Ives on the brain."

"No? Well, it looks like it."

"But for me, Essington, the girls might go altogether to the dogs. Look at Lucy. Because she fell in love with

that foolish fellow, Captain Blake, and he with her, you must needs let them marry! Of course she has been buried alive ever since at that bog-hole of a place of his, in Ireland, living no doubt upon milk and potatoes."

Lord Essington's face lighted up with mirth. "It is a very pretty place," he said. "I would ask nothing better than to live there myself; and Blake's a good fellow, and Lucy is as happy as the day's long. And his six thousand a-year will give them something better than milk and potatoes, I take it."

"Do you *really* mean to let her have him?"

"Well, yes; there's no help for it—and I expect she has told Pomeroy so by this time. It is not my fault; I did not choose him: you must acknowledge that, Lucinda."

"They chose one another, it seems," snapped the countess.

"Quite so. And you, by allowing them to be always together, winked at it. Pardon the word."

"But I thought he came for Geraldine," said poor, mistaken Lady Essington, with something very like a sob. "At least, we hoped it. I should have been the envy of every house in London had we secured St. Ives."

The earl laughed. To his unsophisticated nature, these anglings after settlements, so rife in the great world, were a source of both wonder and amusement.

"I saw Winchester in the clerks' office as I came out; waiting to see Hildyard, I suppose," remarked Lady Essington, as she related her visit to the lawyer's and enlarged upon the "slur" that lay on the Pomeroy's. "He must be in a mess again."

"Hildyard is not their man of business."

"Perhaps their own man won't have anything more to do with Winchester; he may be trying to get Hildyard to take him up," said the countess. "A fine time Lord Sones must have of it!"

"Ay," assented her husband, suppressing a sigh. Other fathers had "fine times" with their sons as well as Earl Sones.

Meanwhile, Anna, escaping to her own room, effaced the marks of tears from her face and then went to the drawing-

room. Leolin, waiting alone, uneasy, full of suspense, turned when the door opened. She closed it, and halted there. He walked towards her: his face grave, his voice low, his hand outstretched.

"How is it to be, Anna?" he began, with some emotion. "Your father would not give me any answer this morning; he said I must come again."

But the tender light in her blue eyes, the soft blushes that came and went, told him enough. With a faint cry of pleasure, he caught her to him.

"My darling, I see it! You are to be mine?"

"Papa has left it to me, Leolin."

"And then—my darling will leave it to me. And I say she must be mine without any unnecessary loss of time."

"Oh, but not yet, Leolin."

"Not yet! Why so?" he asked, taking a chair near her.

"Oh, I don't know. It is only just settled—only to-day."

"But it is a great many to-days that we have loved each other. Ah, Anna, what should we have done had I remained a poor attaché? What might be in your mind I did not presume to ask then; but I know that I was troubled and tormented beyond measure, fearing that, poor as I was, and with no position, I might not presume to ask for you. Now and then it has crossed my mind to go out to India and beg my good-natured brother George to give me an income. I think he would have done it."

"Was he very good-natured?"

"Very. Few natures are so generous as was that of George Pomeroy. He was the least selfish man I ever knew. He was not married, you know, had no children to provide for; and, I do believe that, had I gone to him and told him about you, he would have made things easy for us. What of the duke?"

"I saw him after you left. I told him how impossible it was that I should accept him—and, Leolin, I did say that I had longed to give him a hint before, only that of course I could not do so. He was very kind when he fully under-

stood how it was; and I said I hoped we should always be good friends."

"To be sure. We will invite him down to Pomeroy. I like St. Ives myself, and—— What a lovely child!"

A little fairy, arrayed in white, with delicate features, large, lustrous eyes of light brown, and silky curls, was peeping into the room. Lady Anna held out her hand.

"Come in, Annaline."

The child advanced, modestly and timidly. Leolin drew her towards him.

"What a sweet expression!" he said aside to Anna. "Who is she?"

"Tell your name to this gentleman, my dear," said Anna.

"Annaline Hetley," lisped the child.

"Annaline, does she say?" repeated Leolin. "I never heard the name before. It is a pretty one."

"She is the little daughter of Captain Hetley: his father was papa's first cousin. Frank is a great favourite of papa's," added Anna, changing her language to French, and speaking freely in her open nature, "and deserves to be so. But he is very poor, and he was sadly improvident in marrying early."

"As improvident, I suppose, as I should have been called had I married you when I had nothing to marry upon," laughed Leolin.

"That is just poor Frank's case," she said, her eyes lighting up. "I don't think he has much besides his pay. He fell in love with the daughter of a brother-officer, and married her."

"She was poor, also, I suppose?"

"Of course. And she was of no family, therefore I am sorry to say that all our family despise her, except papa, and treat her rather cavalierly. But oh, Leolin, she is one of the best, most refined, and nicest of women. If any one ever had a treasure in a wife, it is Frank. Papa fears, though, he will have to sell out."

Before the day was over, Lady Essington had come round, so far as to be gracious to Leolin. The fact truly was, that she would have found no fault with the alliance—nay,

would have rejoiced in it—had not the duke, with his riches and his title, inopportunately stepped in. Mr. Pomeroy was rich, but the Duke of St. Ives was richer ; and the more we have, you know, the more we covet.

“ Did Guy Pomeroy leave any children ? ” inquired Lady Geraldine that evening of her mother, when the family sat alone.

“ A girl. No heir.”

“ I should not care to go to a home already occupied,” she continued, for she had not got over her resentment. “ I hear the widow lives there : and a nice woman she must be ! ”

“ She is welcome to live there,” interposed Anna, her sweet voice a very antidote for all ills of temper. “ The abbey is large enough for more than one household.”

“ When Anna becomes Mrs. Pomeroy the widow will subside into her proper place,” spoke Lady Essington.

“ It is usual for the widows of the Lords of Pomeroy to have their own apartments at the abbey,” observed Anna. “ Leolin has told me a great deal about the Pomeroy customs.”

“ Oh, the Pomeroy's own to all sorts of old customs and traditions, and they think they must obey them : Mrs. Knox was saying so to-day,” returned Geraldine. “ Even to calling themselves Lords of Pomeroy, which Leolin has wisely dropped. But they were always a peculiar race,” she concluded, “ and very superstitious.”

CHAPTER III.

GUY'S CHILD.

ONCE more, as in the days gone by, Pomeroy Abbey was raising its proud head, conscious of the presence of its chief. Leolin had come down to see that things should be in readiness for his bride. Six years now, and no chief had been in residence.

Since the death of Guy, his widow had lived in that part of the abbey which stood between the gateway and the south tower. Leolin, wishing to show courtesy to her as his brother's widow (though he would never be able to show her cordiality), decided to leave her in it undisturbed. He would reside in the other part of the front portion, and in the north wing, which adjoined it. How Mrs. Pomeroy would like to be deposed from her state and authority—for no other had supplanted her—was another question. She lived a retired life. Stories had gone about to her prejudice at the time of Guy's death, but time had softened down the feeling against her, and formal visits were paid her. The ardent longing for personal homage and for gaiety, which had been amongst her besetting sins, seemed entirely to have left her. That fatal night had turned the current of her life. She was now reserved, cold, proud; and had become, as the French happily term it, a *dévoté*. Yet how young she was still—wanting yet some few years of thirty.

Mrs. Pomeroy had not been quite without suitors during these six years. Perhaps we ought to say would-be suitors, for only one had ventured to bring matters to a climax. That was Charles Knox, of the Knoll: a man of good property, and a relative of old Mrs. Knox, who knew the Essingtons. Whether it was Alice Pomeroy's fortune, or her beauty, or her position, that made the attraction, certain it was that several men desired to marry her. Mr. Knox was the first to try his fate; and he received his answer—an answer which surprised him. Had he presented himself to Mrs. Pomeroy with a proposition to poison her, he could not have been met with greater indignation. She looked ready to strike him—"and, egad, I thought she'd have done it," he said, later, when telling the tale to a friend. Mrs. Pomeroy ordered him out of the abbey and the doors to be closed against him, after telling him that his proposal was an insult and himself a madman for making it, and asking him, with an intensity of scorn that has rarely been equalled, whether he supposed she would marry *him* after having been the wife of the Lord of Pomeroy. The report of this got

wind somehow ; it served to deter other aspirants, and Mrs. Pomeroy was left unmolested.

In the business room below, which had shelves and account-books and tin boxes and desks in it, and which adjoined another and larger business room that was called the audience chamber, sat Leolin Pomeroy, and Gaunt, the exgentleman-keeper. For Gaunt was not the keeper now. He had given up that post when he took upon himself the control of the property, in compliance with the wishes of the late lord, George.

John Gaunt, looking noble as ever, but worn and thin, sat before the large desk, which he always used. It was in fact the lord's desk—when any reigning lord chose to meddle with his own affairs and keep his own accounts. Leolin had drawn a chair near to it. They were going over the receipts and expenditure of the last six years ; the years that had elapsed since Guy died and George succeeded. Leolin, chief now, thought he had a right to inquire into these items ; and Gaunt, courteous ever, afforded him all the information he asked for.

"How well the estate has righted itself," observed Leolin in grateful admiration. "You have been an excellent manager."

"I have done my best," replied Gaunt.

"And were all the net revenues, except the portion paid to Mrs. Pomeroy, transmitted to my brother George?"

"Yes. All."

"You transmitted them yourself?"

"No : I have paid them over to Mr. Hildyard. It was he who transmitted them to your brother."

"I wonder what George did with the money?" cried Leolin musingly, leaning back in his chair and thrusting his hands into his pockets. "He could not spend it ; it's not likely he would, out there. I hope he has left a will!"

"Oh yes, he is sure to have done that."

"Not at all sure, Gaunt. George was always careless in money-matters—thinking of all the world before himself. And his death was unexpected, remember. If he has not left a will, who—I wonder—would come in for the money?"

"His wife and child," spoke Gaunt, who seemed just then to have gone into a reverie on his own score.

"Wife and child! You are dreaming, Gaunt," laughed Leolin. "Were you thinking of poor Guy?"

"Perhaps I was," said Gaunt, rousing himself, and plunging into the books again.

"I should have a share, I suppose; and Joan, and Isabel; and—would *she*?"

"Who, sir?"

"Mrs. Pomeroy."

"I should fancy not."

"I suppose the servants have behaved well, Gaunt?"

"Very well indeed. They have not had too much to do," added Gaunt, with a smile.

Leolin threw back his head. "No, indeed! The whole lot of them basking in idleness here, just because they were George's servants, whilst I had to work like a horse over yonder"

Gaunt answered nothing. His head was bent over his figures again. In half-an-hour their task was finished, and Gaunt rose, after locking up the desk.

"Then, in a week's time we shall see you here again," he casually remarked to Leolin; who was returning to London on the morrow.

"In a week's time you will see me here again, all being well, and my wife with me. And then," added Leolin, "I shall ask you to resign your trusteeship, Gaunt, and give you many thanks for your faithful stewardship. I mean to go in for work myself."

"I should like to keep it on a little longer," said Gaunt quietly.

"Why?"

"It may be better that I should do so."

"You are not ready with the accounts, I suppose."

"Ready at any moment, as far as the accounts go," replied Gaunt. "But—I am not quite ready on other scores."

They stood looking at one another. Gaunt, calm, noble, towering in his great height nearly a head above Leolin, who was himself only of middle height. Leolin thought

Gaunt's manner peculiar; and he was suddenly struck with his look of illness.

"Are you not well, Gaunt?"

"Not very."

"You are frightfully thin. Why don't you speak to Norris?"

"Oh, I don't think it is anything serious," was the careless answer.

"How do you do, Uncle Leolin?" demanded a young lady of some six years old, who came running into the room. It was Mary Pomeroy, Guy's child. She was very pretty; with the large grey Pomeroy eyes, and well-formed features. Her complexion was of that rather dark tinge that sometimes accompanies grey eyes, and the colour on her cheeks was more vermilion than rose. She carried her little head proudly, her fair curls falling on her neck, and walked with the air of a queen.

"Is it you, Mary? Come and give me a kiss."

"No, Uncle Leolin," was the defiant answer.

"No! And why?"

"Because you turned me out of the garden yesterday. You made Bridget take me indoors."

"But it rained. You were getting wet—and you had thin shoes on."

"They were my dancing shoes: I had been taking my lesson. But I won't kiss you, Uncle Leolin. I like the rain, and I always have my own way when you are not here."

"Do you? Then it is as well that I should be here, Miss Mary."

"Do you know that old Jerome is outside in the corridor? He is waiting to see you."

"Is he?" cried Leolin, quickly. "Tell him to come in, there's a little fairy."

"You may tell him yourself, Uncle Leolin. If you are not good to me, I shall not be good to you."

Anything more commanding than the air of this little lady, as she stood, still and resolute, was never seen. She had inherited the stern, indomitable spirit of her father,

and she had been the indulged plaything of the abbey—in fact, its little mistress—so that all the obstinate self-will had been fostered, not repressed. A daring child was Mary Pomeroy; and she had one of those remarkably sensible, precocious minds that are sometimes looked upon with awe. She would say things more suited to a girl of sixteen than one of six. Leolin laughed; and Gaunt, who was departing, sent in Jerome.

“How is it you have not been to see me before, Jerome?” asked Leolin, shaking hands with the old man. “I have been here these three days.”

Jerome made the best of his excuse. It was only yesterday he heard that Mr. Leolin had arrived.

“Well, I went to the keep yesterday to see you, Jerome, as you did not come to see me, and I could not get in,” said Leolin. “I rang three or four times at that tinkling old bell of yours, which must have been cast in the year One.”

“I ask your pardon, sir. I must have stepped out.”

“You must be lonely in that silent keep, Jerome! Will you come back to the abbey?”

“Many thanks, Mr. Leolin, but I could not,” returned the old man, with almost trembling eagerness. “I’m used to my keep now, sir, and I could not leave it again.”

“As you will. Look here, Jerome—is Gaunt a little touched?”

“A little what, sir?”

“Touched in the head,” explained Leolin, tapping his forehead. Jerome looked surprised.

“Why, Mr. Leolin, he has one of the strongest of heads, has Gaunt.”

“His manner was certainly queer this morning, and he looks ill. When I told him I should take the accounts into my own hands, thanking him for his faithful stewardship, he intimated that he could not give them up. The accounts were ready, he said, but he was not.”

“Anything that Gaunt says, he must have his reasons for; be sure of that, Mr. Leolin.”

“I like Gaunt,” struck in Mary Pomeroy, defiantly, as if

it behoved her to take up his championship. "He is kinder than you, Uncle Leolin. When I was little, he made me a present of a beautiful grey donkey, and taught me to ride."

Leolin laughed as he took the young lady's hand. "I am going to pay a visit to your mother: will you conduct me," said he, playfully. And Miss Mary walked up the grand staircase full of importance. She liked patronage of all kinds.

Mrs. Pomeroy was seated in the sombre oak chamber, which faced the quadrangle. Handsome though its carved paneling was, it looked dull and dark. Only she herself could know what her feelings were, as she gazed on that fatal west tower that faced her, what her repentance for the foolish part she had played.

Some work of fine silken embroidery was in her hand, which she put down as Leolin entered. She wore rich black silk; on her bright hair some black lace rested and fell, somewhat after the fashion of the mantilla worn by a Spanish woman. It was Mrs. Pomeroy's custom to wear this now. Her mother sometimes scolded her for making herself "into an old woman," but she adhered to it.

How thin she was—thin, worn, and anxious looking! But her face retained its old beauty, and a soft bright colour flushed her cheeks as she rose to greet Leolin Pomeroy. He had paid her one formal visit on his arrival; he was now paying her a second, preparatory to his departure.

"I must thank you for allowing me to retain these rooms," she said, and there was a harshness in her tones, as there always had been, which grated on Leolin, who liked a low sweet voice, that "most excellent thing in woman." "I believe that I ought, according to former custom, to have removed into the south wing: but I have grown to love these rooms and should have been sorry to quit them. I thank you for your courtesy."

"I am glad that you should retain them: I should not think of wishing you to leave them," spoke Leolin, in his natural good feeling. He did not like Mrs. Pomeroy; but

she was his brother's widow, and he accorded her personal deference.

"And I hope," he continued, "that you and my wife, Lady Anna, will be good friends. I am sure you will like her."

"I shall be glad to make Lady Anna's acquaintance," replied Mrs. Pomeroy, coldly. And she took up her work again.

Conversation flagged. Leolin had to make it; she answered him in monosyllables, apparently without interest. He rose to terminate his visit.

"I forgot to ask you one thing," she interposed. "Have you heard any further particulars of your brother George's death?"

"Nothing more than we heard at first," he answered: "that poor George died in action. He went forth in the morning, bright, well, and in high spirits; and at night he was lying dead in a tent on the battle-field."

"It was very sad," sighed Mrs. Pomeroy.

"His confidential servant, Moore, is on his way home, I believe. He will bring all details, with George's personal effects and papers. We thought Moore would have landed ere this," added Leolin, as he formally shook hands with Mrs. Pomeroy, and quitted the room. Mary was in the corridor with her skipping-rope.

"Did mamma tell you I was naughty, Uncle Leolin?"

"Well—I dare say she might have told me, had I asked her if you were so."

"I would not do my lessons this morning. Miss Lorne has the toothache; and mamma wanted to hear them instead, and I ran away. But I don't call that being *very* naughty, Uncle Leolin."

The old Abbey of Pomeroy stood out, its walls grey and gloomy in the dim twilight of the August evening. Its windows, however, were in contrast to the walls, many of them being as gay as light could make them, and its retainers bustled about in their preparations; for Leolin Pomeroy was bringing home his bride.

The marriage had taken place in London the previous day. Leolin would fain have reached the abbey the same night; but it was too far, so they made a halt on the road. Now, in the twilight of the second day, they were nearing it; and Lady Anna leaned forward in the carriage to look for the first time upon her future home. The huge pile rose, high and mighty, in front of her.

"What a large place, Leolin!"

"It is, my dearest."

"And there is a real ghost that haunts it, they say."

Leolin laughed. "I fear the ghost has been dead and gone this many a year: however disappointing it may be to your love of romance."

"Which are Mrs. Pomeroy's rooms?"

"Those to the right of the entrance, facing us. The reigning lord has always occupied the whole of the front, but I would not turn Mrs. Pomeroy out. We shall occupy the rooms on this side the entrance and the north wing which adjoins it."

"It must take an army of servants to keep it up; only this front pile is immense. Will there be two households, Leolin? Our own and Mrs. Pomeroy's?"

"Certainly. We shall have nothing to do with Mrs. Pomeroy, or she with us: she has her own servants and household, and we have ours. You and she need not meet once in a twelvemonth, unless you both please to do so."

"But, Leolin, I think it will be pleasant to meet: I am glad she is there. What sort of a person is she? Young?"

"Seven or eight-and-twenty, I fancy, and still beautiful. I have only known her lately, have seen her only three times in all; but she strikes me as being the very saddest being I ever came across—proud, reserved, and sorrowful; and they say that formerly, before that dreadful catastrophe, she was all life and merriment. She moves about with a softened footstep, sees little, if any, society, and seems to take no interest in life; scarcely even in her child, though I believe she is passionately fond of her."

The carriage rolled in at the large gateway, and drew up

at the entrance—that on the right. The servants stood within the hall on either side, bowing to their lord and their new lady. Old Jerome had come from the keep to take his place at their head. Lady Anna spoke a few timid words to them: but there was kindness in her tone, gentleness in her face and manner. The servants knew at once that their future mistress was one to be loved.

Lady Anna was pleased with all she saw. The rooms were so numerous it would take her a week to know her way about them, she laughingly said. Some of them had been decorated for her, under John Gaunt's superintendence; modernized, he called it; and were of almost regal splendour; but the greater portion remained quaint, sombre, and ancient.

"Do you think you shall be happy here?" whispered Leolin, as he went to her dressing-room to take her away for dinner. "Do you regret St. Ives?"

Regret? A husband she loved, and a princely home, compared with what might have been—the simple Duke of St. Ives and his domineering mother! She clasped her hands as she dwelt on the suggested contrast.

In the morning Leolin showed her over their own portion of the abbey, telling her much of the past history of the Pomeroy's. Anna was deeply interested in all she heard: especially in the tale of the nun's picture and the prediction. That inveterate gossip, old Mrs. Knox, had given Anna her version of it in London, but she heard the truth now. Leolin, at least, was not superstitious; contact with the world had rubbed childish impressions out of him; but Anna had rather a love for the marvellous.

The afternoon was passing when they strolled into the garden—the large enclosure stretching out at the north side of the abbey. Gaunt had taken care that it should be well kept up.

"I could lose myself here as well as in the abbey, Leolin. What sheltering trees—what beautiful flowers—what winding walks and shady groves! But—Leolin—who is that?"

Leolin followed the direction of her eyes, and saw a lady

who had just come into view round the bend by the cascade, a child by her side.

"That is Mrs. Pomeroy, Anna. I will bring her here and introduce you to one another."

But Mrs. Pomeroy, the instant she caught sight of them, had turned sharply away towards the shrubbery, which would take her to the entrance-gate; seizing the child's hand as she went. Miss Mary drew her hand away again and ran towards Leolin.

"Mary, stay here," quickly exclaimed Mrs. Pomeroy.

"It is Uncle Leolin, mamma. I am going to him," replied Miss Mary, exercising as usual her own indomitable will. And she continued her way to Leolin in defiance of her mother.

"Have you come back to the abbey, Uncle Leolin?"

"Yes," answered he, stooping to kiss her. "Go and speak to that lady, Mary."

"Who is she?" returned the child.

"She is Lady Anna Pomeroy, and my wife. You must be great friends."

Walking quickly forward, he overtook Mrs. Pomeroy. She coldly shook him by the hand.

"My wife is there," he said. "Will you come now, and be introduced to her?"

"Would it be agreeable?"

"Oh yes; she wishes to make your acquaintance. We arrived home last night; as I dare say you heard."

Meanwhile Mary had drawn towards Lady Anna with a slow but fearless step, her grey eyes—the keen Pomeroy eyes—scanning her closely. Anna held out her hand that she might come quicker; but the child, instead of responding to the welcome, halted at a few yards' distance.

"Uncle Leolin says you are his wife."

"I believe I am," smiled Anna. "Tell me your name, my dear."

"Mary Alice Joan Pomeroy. Papa was Guy, Lord of Pomeroy. Uncle Leolin's the lord now."

"Yes, I know he is."

"And mamma used to be the lady," she said, defiantly. "Were you ever at the abbey before?"

"No."

"That's the east tower, and that's the north tower," said the child, gravely doing the honours of her paternal home. "And that queer place, over there, is the keep. Jerome lives in it."

Anna looked in the direction of the keep, and saw a round structure of grey stone, covered with moss like the abbey, a small narrow window here and there discernible.

"Who is Jerome?" she asked. "Stay—I remember. I saw him last night."

"Jerome was the confidential attendant on the Lords of Pomeroy. Do you know what that means?"

"Yes," laughed Anna.

"He was grandpapa's attendant: and when grandpapa died, he became papa's; and when papa died, he would not stay in the abbey any longer, but went to the keep. I was a baby then, but Bridget tells me about it. I go to see Jerome sometimes."

"The keep belongs to the abbey then; to the Pomeroy's?" continued Anna, thinking her a singularly intelligent child for her age.

"It belongs to them, of course. It was Uncle George's while he lived, and now it is Uncle Leolin's. Did you know that Uncle George never came home, though he was the lord?"

"I have heard so."

"But the keep is Jerome's to live in for his life: the old lord gave it him when he was dying. That was my grandpapa: we call him the old lord."

"Who has made you so wise—and told you all this?"

"They all tell me. Bridget tells me, and Jerome tells me, and Aunt Joan tells me when she comes here, and Gaunt tells me. Gaunt used to be the gentleman-game-keeper. The men under him were the real keepers, you know, though Gaunt was called so; but Gaunt was really a gentleman, and traces his descent far back, as we do. I hear nothing but tales of the Pomeroy's. We are descended from kings, so there are many things to tell of us; we are not like common people. You should hear old Naomi Rex talk about us."

"Who is Naomi Rex?"

"She is Bridget's aunt, and lives in the forest—and when I rode up there on my pretty donkey that Gaunt gave me, she used to come out and feed it with stuff from her garden. You don't know how angry I used to make Bridget, because I would gallop the donkey, and Bridget could not run fast enough to keep up with me. That was when I was little. I have a pony now."

"And does Bridget still run beside you?"

"No: we borrow Jeffs."

"Jeffs?"

"Jeffs is the lord's coachman, not mamma's; ours is Croft; but mamma likes best to trust me to Jeffs because he is old and steady. Jeffs rides one of the old horses that won't go faster than my pony. I asked Jeffs at first why he would not be mamma's coachman, and he said he should have been hers, only I was a girl and not a boy. We go up to old Naomi's, and she tells me tales of the Pomeroy's—how great and good they were. Mamma will not let me repeat the tales to her; she says she has heard too much of them. But then, you see, mamma is not a true Pomeroy."

"You are a strange child!" involuntarily exclaimed Lady Anna.

"That's because I am a Pomeroy," returned the young lady. "If I want to make mamma angry, I tell her that I am a Pomeroy and she is not. She whipped me once for saying it and banished me to the nursery for two days. I did not care: I have the Pomeroy spirit."

"How can they have brought the child up like this?" thought Anna, feeling quite dismayed. "And I am sure she would be a charming child, properly trained."

As the thought passed through Anna's mind, Leolin came up with Mrs. Pomeroy, who had lingered unnecessarily. He introduced them to each other.

"Mrs. Pomeroy," he briefly said. "And this," he added, "is my wife, Lady Anna."

Anna blushed, and put out her hand cordially—as between connections. Mrs. Pomeroy wore the same attire that we last saw her in: rich black silk, made tight to the throat;

a black lace mantilla on her head. Anna was in light silk; her fair hair, worn without ornament, gleaming in the sunlight every time she moved her parasol. It was a very hot day, and neither of them wore a bonnet. They were quite a contrast: the one looking so gay and bright; the other so dark and sombre: even her parasol was black. .

Anna, blushing, had put out her hand, hoping for an answering welcome. To this sensitive girl, the coming to Pomeroy Abbey to supplant Mrs. Pomeroy, had seemed a formidable thing, and she yearned for a few words of sympathy. But Mrs. Pomeroy curtsied distantly, and would not meet the hand; would not appear to see it.

They stood in silence. An unpleasant silence, resulting from Mrs. Pomeroy's marked discourtesy. Therefore, when a dusty travelling-carriage, drawn by four post-horses, came into view, as it did at the moment, the diversion served to soften the awkward feeling. From this part of the garden the approach to the abbey was visible; and this travelling-carriage, its blinds down, had turned off the high-road and was sweeping up it. A man-servant, wearing mourning, sat on the box, and a coat-of-arms was emblazoned on the panels. The eyes of Mary were quick; she was the first to speak.

"The Pomeroy arms! Why, it must be Aunt Joan!"

But the eyes of Leolin had expanded with amazement as he gazed. They were the arms of the reigning lords of Pomeroy, and he alone had a right to use them. Mrs. Pomeroy strained her gaze, and her face became white as death.

"It can never be Rupert!" burst from the compressed lips of Leolin, his thoughts flying to the one who ought to have been lord, and was not so."

Mary Pomeroy laid hold of her uncle. "Look at mamma," she said in a frightened whisper.

He turned, as did his wife; and they hastened to support Mrs. Pomeroy. Her hands had dropped, her features were drawn and ghastly. The mention of Rupert had frightened her to agony: was he in truth coming home to brave his fate? No one in the world would dare to use those arms, excepting Rupert.

CHAPTER IV.

STARTLING VISITORS.

THE carriage, that was causing so much painful speculation, drove in at the large archway, and stopped. A lady, attired in deep mourning—a tall, handsome, regal-looking woman—descended from it, followed by a female attendant and a sick child, a boy of some seven or eight years old. She inquired for Mrs. Pomeroy, and was ushered up the grand staircase.

Mrs. Pomeroy, sitting on a garden-bench and still faint, received the message from one of her servants—which message Leolin pressed forward to hear. How greatly both felt relieved it were superfluous to tell. Only a lady: a traveller apparently, who had come to crave speech of her. But where on earth had she obtained the carriage?

Alice proceeded to her reception-rooms. The first thing she saw was the child lying on a sofa, his attendant standing near him. The lady rose from her chair at Mrs. Pomeroy's entrance, threw back her crape veil, and they stood face to face.

"Do you know me?" the stranger inquired.

Remembrance was dawning over Alice Pomeroy. Surely it was Sybilla Gaunt, the daughter of Gaunt, the gentleman-keeper; she who had left the village nearly eight years before, and with whose good name rumour had made free. There was no mistaking her; those noble features, once seen, could not be forgotten.

"You are Sybilla Gaunt!"

"I was Sybilla Gaunt, years ago. I am Sybilla Pomeroy."

Mrs. Pomeroy froze at once. "What may be the purport of your visit?" she coldly asked.

"I requested to see you privately, as in courtesy bound: and to explain to you why I must from henceforth assume my rights: however sorry I shall be," she added with a bow, "to displace the Lady of Pomeroy."

"I am not the Lady of Pomeroy," sharply interrupted Alice.

"Not in point of fact: I am aware of that: but you have held sway here."

"I do not hold it now," interposed Alice, her voice sounding harsher than usual. "It is not I who am Lady of Pomeroy."

"Then who is?—if you will allow me to ask."

"The Lady Anna, the wife of Leolin. "Leolin is Lord of Pomeroy."

"Leolin! Surely it is not possible that Leolin has assumed——"

Mrs. Pomeroy would not allow her to go on. Once more came her harsh voice in interruption.

"Leolin is the Lord of Pomeroy by right," she haughtily said. "He has no need to *assume* to be so."

The visitor approached the sofa. Taking her child by the hand, she whispered to him: "Rupert, my dear, can you walk a few steps? Yes, I think you can. I want you to see this lady."

She lovingly lifted him down, and led him up to Mrs. Pomeroy. A graceful, aristocratic child, though now fearfully pale and thin. His features were beautiful: he had his mother's expressive violet eyes, with the long, dark lashes: but there was no mistaking that his sire had been a Pomeroy. The visitor held him before her.

"This child," she said, "is Lord of Pomeroy."

Mrs. Pomeroy, taken by surprise, could neither assent nor refute: but a sudden thought prompted her to speak. "Is it well," haughtily pointing to the servant, "that family discussions should be carried on before a menial?"

"She is French, and does not understand a word of our language. Mrs. Pomeroy, Leolin is not lord, and never has been. The moment the breath went out of my husband's body, his son, this child, became Lord of Pomeroy."

"It is easy to assert a thing," scornfully laughed Mrs. Pomeroy. "George Pomeroy may have made you a tardy reparation—I know not: you will doubtless say so—but this child is seven years old, if he is a day."

"You may have heard of the Gaunt blood," spoke Sybilla calmly; "my father would tell you that it is not less pure than fiery. Can you look at me, and believe that I have ever disgraced it?"

"You left the village to follow George Pomeroy."

"Yes; but, many months before that, I had, become George Pomeroy's wife. We were married here. Here, in the chapel attached to the abbey."

"Can this be true?" murmured Mrs. Pomeroy.

"I will not reiterate the assertion," was the proud retort.

"It will be as easily proved as your own marriage."

"It was performed in secret?"

"It had to be performed in secret for certain reasons of my husband's. It was known to none, excepting the priest who married us, good Father Andrew, and Rupert."

"Oh! Known to Rupert!"

Disbelief, almost bordering upon scorn, marked the tone of the last words. Sybilla quietly corrected it.

"Certainly to Rupert. He was present at the marriage. Later, when George came over to the old lord's funeral, he disclosed the truth to my father and to Guy; and he made all necessary arrangements for my quitting Abbeyland, but I wished to remain in it as long as I could, for my father's sake. When I did leave, Rupert took me as far as Holyhead, and George received me on the other side. A little later, my boy was born."

"In Ireland?"

"In Ireland. George was quartered there. He afterwards started for India with the regiment. I followed him when I was strong enough, taking my child and its nurse. The Indian climate did not agree with the child, and he has not been very strong," she added, glancing fondly at Rupert, who had returned to the distant sofa. "He is nearly eight years old now."

"He is veritably and truly Lord of Pomeroy?" uttered Mrs. Pomeroy, unable to take in the fact, though she no longer doubted the truth of the story.

"He is as truly Lord of Pomeroy as any one can be, save—save—him who is yet a fugitive. *He* is the veritable

Lord of Pomeroy, and will be to his life's end, although he is debarred from enjoying his rights."

"I think he must be dead," whispered Mrs. Pomeroy, with quivering lips.

"No, he is not dead," Sybilla was beginning. But she broke off suddenly, her tone changing to coldness. "Let the subject, if you please, be a barred one between us, Mrs. Pomeroy. It is one you may not care to dwell upon; and I will not."

Alice Pomeroy's face deepened to crimson: the next minute it was left paler than before. Her lips trembled.

"I see. You have no more pity for me than others have had. You judge me harshly, as they did. No one stood by me in my bitter trial. In common humanity you must finish the sentence you began. Is he living?"

"Yes. At least he was a short time ago. My husband used to have communications from him now and then."

"From himself! By letter! He may be coming back here," added Mrs. Pomeroy in agitation. "He may, not understanding his danger, be wishing to endeavour to assume his rights as Lord of Pomeroy."

"He will never do that," replied Sybilla, her voice inexpressibly sad. "He recognized George as the fitting lord, under the circumstances, and this child as his heir."

That Sybilla in her heart condoned the unhappy Rupert's sins, there appeared to be little room to doubt. Mrs. Pomeroy began to shiver. She often did when the past was brought unexpectedly before her: and she did not at all forgive Sybilla for bringing it up now.

"With what object have you returned here?" she resumed pettishly.

"Need you ask—now that you know who I am?" returned Sybilla, with quiet dignity. "To bring up my child in the home of his inheritance; and to reside in it of my own right."

Mrs. Pomeroy mused. "How will Leolin receive this?—and his wife, Lady Anna? They were married only two days ago."

"I cannot understand it. Notice was sent to Mr. Mild-

yard that George left a son—who had of course become the inheritor. And my father knew it all along. How they can have suffered poor Leolin to assume the inheritance is inexplicable.”

“Why did you not come over at once?”

“I came as soon as I was able; as soon as little Rupert’s health permitted me. George’s own man attended us, bringing all his papers and effects. We came by the overland route. In Paris Rupert was again taken ill, and that detained us yet further. But I saw no reason for any particular haste, knowing of the instructions sent to Mr. Hildyard,” concluded Sybilla.

“It will be a blow for Leolin.”

“I am very, very sorry to inflict it—but I have no choice. I would not willingly have come to sow discord: if Leolin will be reasonable, I will be so. They may have sway still, in all that does not concern my boy,” added Sybilla.

“Had you any other children?”

“Three,” she sighed. “They died in India.”

“I know who this one is like,” said Mrs. Pomeroy—“like him he is named after. Oh, why did you name him Rupert?” she continued, in a tone of pain.

“We liked the name: and George was always fond of his brother Rupert. Rupert joined us in Ireland, and was at the child’s christening. But I must see Leolin.”

Mrs. Pomeroy sent a messenger to request Leolin’s presence. Strange, perhaps, to say, this astounding news was not unwelcome to her, now that she came to revolve it. She disliked Leolin: he had not been sparing of his scorn of herself and her deeds when he came over at Guy’s death, and some good-natured listener had repeated the words to her. She had never forgiven Leolin. It would not be too much to say that she hated him: and she would rather Sybilla reigned than he.

Leolin, still lingering in the garden with his wife, came up in answer to Mrs. Pomeroy’s message, unconscious of the trouble that awaited him. It chanced that the French maid was leading the little boy from the room as he approached it, and they met in the corridor. His notice

fell on the child ; so sickly-looking, so handsome, so like—it struck Leolin at once—his brother Rupert. Aye, and like George, also.

Passing onwards, he entered the drawing-room, and gazed with amazement at Sybilla, whom he instantly recognized.

“Why, Sybilla! is it you?” he exclaimed. “Have you come back again?”

Mrs. Pomeroy glided up to them. “Leolin, she is the Lady of Pomeroy.”

Leolin looked from one to the other with a darkening brow. “The Lady of—what do you say?”

But it was Sybilla herself who interposed. “Leolin, I am indeed Lady of Pomeroy; and have been, ever since the fatal night that deprived the abbey of Guy. It was George, you know, who succeeded him: Rupert could not do so.”

“Well?” quoth Leolin, wonderingly.

“Well—I was George’s wife.”

“Wife!” sneered Leolin.

“I was George’s wife long before your father died.”

“I heard a tale of Sybilla Gaunt’s flying from the village with a Pomeroy—after she could no longer remain in it,” scoffed Leolin. “But Rupert was indicated as the gallant.”

The Lady of Pomeroy confronted him, not giving way to anger, as might have been natural. “I was married to George in the chapel here,” she calmly said; “Guy and Rupert became the confidants of the secret, for my husband thought it well to impart it to them; Rupert at the time, Guy later. I did remain here for many months afterwards; and then I joined my husband in Ireland, where the child was born. Rupert came to us there, and was godfather to the boy.”

“It is a forged——”

“Stay,” she interrupted, arresting what was about to follow. “Are the Gaunts capable of falsehood? Though my father’s patrimony and position have been dwindling down for generations, did you ever know him guilty of a dishonourable word or action? He has yielded obedience

to the Lords of Pomeroÿ, but he is still the descendant of the noblest of the land, and I am his daughter. *You know* that I would tell you nothing but truth. If you choose to assume that it is not true, send for Father Andrew to confirm what I say. He married us."

Leolin stood confounded: he had no words of denial at hand.

"I am George's widow," she quietly repeated, "and his child, Rupert, is his heir. I have come back to my fatherland to enter upon my own rights; I have come to the abbey to inhabit it. If I chose to assume my full rights, I should not live in it as the late lord's widow, but as the reigning lady. It can own no other lady than myself, as long as my child shall be unmarried. You may perceive that no choice is left me; that for my child's sake I must do this. But, Leolin, I have said to Mrs. Pomeroÿ—Where is she?"

Sybilla turned, and Leolin turned. Mrs. Pomeroÿ, who was at their side a moment before, was no longer to be seen. She had silently left the room, though they had not noticed her departure.

"I have not come, Leolin, to raise up a whirlwind. I shall not care to fulfil one part of the Lady of Pomeroÿ's duties—that of receiving guests and visiting in return. I shall require a very small space of the abbey; but—you understand me—I must be its recognized mistress: I am content to live in it quietly, superintending the education and watching the health of my son. Therefore, though you are not, and cannot be, the lord, I should yet wish that you would live in it at present as his representative. I should wish that you and your wife—whom I hear you have newly married—should live in it and do its honours, and enjoy a part of its revenues, which I will take care that you receive: that, in fact, you should be chief in everything but name. You will not guess the feeling that prompts me to say this."

He did not ask her to enlighten him; he stood, as before, with compressed lips.

"I will tell you," she said, subduing her voice to a

whisper. "So long as *he* lives, he is the true Lord of Pomeroy. Though by one wild action, committed in the heat of passion, he may have forfeited the right to reign, he is the true inheritor. In spite of his being compelled to live in exile, poverty, he is yet the chief of Pomeroy. Nor George, nor our child, nor you, had, or can have, any real title to these advantages whilst he lives——"

"How can you give utterance to so absurd a theory?" cried Leolin, with anger.

"I speak as I feel," she quietly said. "I feel that, in spite of what happened, he is the only legitimate chief of Pomeroy. Had it been premeditated murder, then, I grant you, exile, death, would be too good for him: but, you know what it was—a quarrel; a scuffle. Thus I feel that not one of us has more right to enjoy these advantages than another; nay, that you, as the last of the brothers excepting him, have perhaps the most. It was this feeling, as much as his disinclination to leave the army on the eve of war, that prevented my husband from coming home to Pomeroy: he felt that the right was a false one, whilst his unhappy brother lived. My child does and must inherit, for we cannot avert the laws of succession: but, Leolin, you and your wife must remain in the abbey, and keep up its splendour and its gaiety."

Still there came no reply.

"Another thing," she went on, in a changed tone. "A voice seems to whisper to me that should I assume my full rights here, it might only be to resign them to you on the death of my child. I do not think he will live. He was never strong in India, and just before his father died he had fever upon fever, and he has never recovered from it. Should he die, as I often fear he will, then you are again Lord of Pomeroy."

"I must repeat that your feeling towards Rupert is unjustifiable; absurdly high-flown."

"It is my feeling," she answered, the blood mantling in her cheeks, "and it was my husband's before me. When he dies, that poor wanderer and exile, then I may wish to take rather more upon myself here than I shall take now."

I may perhaps require Mrs. Pomeroy to resign these state apartments, which she has continued to occupy. But there is one thing I shall never do, Leolin—and that is, displace you and your wife.”

“The poor exile, as you call him—I should rather say the wicked exile—must be dead long ago.”

“He is not dead, Leolin.”

“How do you know it?”

“Because George heard from him just before his own death.”

“Where is he? What is he doing?” asked Leolin, with emotion.

“I cannot tell you where he is; I do not know. So far as George and I could gather, he moved about from one desert place to another, avoiding those frequented by civilized man. Once he wrote to us from the depths of some unknown prairie in the Pacific; once from a desert wild in Africa. His whole life is spent in endeavouring to hide from his fellow-men. It must so be spent unto the end.”

Leolin sighed. He and Rupert had been reared together; they had shared the same chamber in infancy, the same studies in boyhood, the same sports as young men: in spite of what had happened they were still brothers; and there were moments when Leolin felt for him most deeply.

“We have been thinking him dead,” he said. “He has never given us the slightest token that he was living, all these years.”

“How could he give it, Leolin? How did he know but that some of you, in your anger, might wish to bring him to justice? He bound George to secrecy: I hardly know whether I am justified now in speaking.”

“Absurd! We should not be likely to do that.”

“You would not. But you cannot answer for Mrs. Pomeroy. Leolin, shall it be peace between us?”

“I don’t know what it shall be,” roughly replied Leolin, as he turned from the room.

How bitter this blow was to him, he alone knew. In Leolin Pomeroy there had always existed a strong element

of selfishness. He was ambitious; fond of state, of position, and of power; fond of money: not for the money itself, but for the good things it brought. To all this he had attained: and to have it dashed from him, at one fell blow; was almost more than human nature could bear. Is it surprising that a strong feeling of resentment against this new Lady of Pomeroy, and against her child—who seemed to have sprung from the other end of the earth or out of the depths of the sea—should have taken possession of him?

In this mood he chanced to meet Father Andrew. The good priest, jolly and equable as ever, was walking about in the sunshine, on the greensward that skirted the approach to the abbey, thinking of nothing in the world but what Marget was providing for his early supper that night, and hoping it would be a dish of beans and bacon, to which choice delicacy he was particularly partial. During these agreeable anticipations he found himself suddenly pounced upon by Leolin Pomeroy; who had an awful frown on his face, and laid a fierce grasp on his arm.

"That daughter of John Gaunt—Sybilla. Do you mind me, father?"

"Surely I do," spoke the father.

"She has come back here with a tale that you married her to my brother George."

"It is a true tale," replied the priest. "I did marry them."

"Did it lie in your line of duty, Father Andrew, to unite Sybilla Gaunt to a Pomeroy?" demanded Leolin in severe tones.

Nothing put out the good-humoured priest: severity fell harmless upon him. He opened his snuff-box and leisurely helped himself to a pinch.

"You know what the Pomeroy will is: George Pomeroy, good-hearted and gentle though he was, possessed it equally with the rest of you. He did not say to me, Will you marry me? he said, Do it. The licence, and all else, was in order, and I had no choice but to obey."

"Without the sanction of friends on either side!" was Leolin's scornful reproach. "Without witnesses?"

"Had there been no witness at all, I might have demurred. Not that any end would have been gained by it. George would only have taken her off to the next town and married her there. But there was a witness—his brother Rupert. Rupert was present; and, to judge by his manner, heartily sanctioned it. And so she has returned, has she?"

Leolin looked the scorn he did not speak. "Do you know that there is a child?—a boy? She has brought the boy with her to supplant me."

"I knew there was a boy: born eleven or twelve months after the marriage. Since poor George's death and your accession, Gaunt and I have sometimes talked over the possible complication——"

"Complication!" wrathfully echoed Leolin. "Was it well, I ask you, father, to conceal so weighty a matter from me?—to let me believe that George had left no child?"

"Listen," said the priest, pleasantly. "We know about the boy, of course; and that he was George's heir; but he was always so delicate, and of late so ill, that we deemed it probable he would not live to trouble you. Upon George's unexpected death, Sybilla wrote a line to her father; it was little more than a line, in her distress; she said that the child was then as ill as he could be, there remained little hope of him; but that all due instructions should be forwarded to Mr. Hildyard. Well, we thought, naturally thought, that Mr. Hildyard, upon receiving these instructions, would acquaint you at once with the fact that there was a little lad who came in as Lord of Pomeroy. Finding that he did not do so, but, on the contrary, suffered you to enter on the succession, we supposed Hildyard must have received news that the boy was dead. There is the whole matter lying in a nutshell."

"Whether he was dead or living, I ought not to have been kept in this complete ignorance. You and Gaunt have both behaved ill to me, father."

"Nay, nay, my son, not intentionally. In the uncertainty, as to whether the child was alive or dead, we did

not care to speak to you ; preferring, rather, to leave it until Sybilla's return, which has been long expected."

"As to Gaunt's conduct throughout the whole business, I cannot find words to express my detestation of it. He has played his cards well ! It is explained now why he hesitated to give up the stewardship."

"If you mean that he was a party to the marriage, you are mistaken," said the priest. "Gaunt knew no more of it, or of what was agate, than you did. Your father knew of it before Gaunt knew."

"My father !" exclaimed Leolin.

"Ay. I told your father of it on his death-bed. It was, I think, the very day he died. We were talking confidentially, he and I, chiefly about you all, and I saw reason to inform him that I had married George some months before to Sybilla Gaunt. The subject was, in fact, led up to."

"Did my father, dying though he was, explode with anger ?"

"Your father sent his blessing to them. With four sons to marry, he said, one of them might as well choose Sybilla, as not. She was a pure, good girl."

"Did he say so ?"

"They were the old lord's words: Sybilla was a pure, good girl ; of good descent too ; he had always liked her, and she would make George an excellent wife. George had once told him, it seemed, that he should like to choose Sybilla, and the lord had sanctioned the wish. So George was not guilty even of tacit disobedience, you perceive, though he did not at the time disclose the marriage ; in fact, George was about the only one of you who, I am sure, could not be guilty of it."

"And, with all this approbation—which sounds as though it came out of a romance—will you tell me why it was needful to continue to make a secret of the marriage ?" sarcastically asked Leolin. "They might have declared it, as it seems to me."

"I will tell you why they did not," returned the priest. "Your brother George had paid rather too much attention

to his colonel's daughter, or she to him: George declared it was the latter, and I think it likely; he was a handsome fellow, you know. He found, to his consternation, that she expected him to ask for her in marriage: but he cared a great deal too much for Sybilla to do that. He told me that he had hastened his marriage with Sybilla, out of sheer fear that Miss Dillon would extract a promise from him in some weak moment, and he should find himself compelled to marry her. That's why he kept his marriage a secret—lest it should reach the colonel's ears—for a man, you see, likes to stand well with his colonel. Miss Dillon went with her father to India, obliging George—as he considered—still to keep the secret: or at any rate not to declare it publicly. Most of his brother-officers knew it.”

“George was always a coward in some things,” remarked Leolin.

“In what things was he a coward?” rather warmly asked the priest. “George was as brave and good a fellow as ever bent knee to shrine.”

“In the matter of hurting other people's feelings. I've known him walk four miles round, rather than pass the cottage of some ill-doing serf here, whom he had been obliged to blow up. And, witness his never coming home, out of consideration to that miserable wanderer, Rupert.”

“Ah,” said the priest, musingly, a far-off look in his eyes. “But if there were more men like George Pomeroy, the world would be better than it is. I have never known any one so unselfish.”

Leolin turned back to the house. Father Andrew, solacing himself with another liberal portion of snuff, continued his walk, the far-off look of speculation still in his genial eyes. Which speculation might either concern the Pomeroy family, or the problematical feast of beans and bacon.

CHAPTER V.

A WARNING.

LEOLIN POMEROY shut himself up in his library, there to brood over the startling news that the day had brought him. It was a most unpleasant position to be placed in. Had he been single, he might possibly have felt it less: though to be suddenly cut down from his honour and dignity was a mortification of which he could not yet realize the full bitterness. His mind was in a chaos: he could not tell what course to pursue, or how best to neutralize the blow. Could he deny the marriage?—affect to ignore it as a thing that had never taken place? No; that might not be possible: any hope of that kind might prove vain. Could he get it annulled? His eye lighted, and his heart warmed within him at the thought: for he knew how great was the Pomeroy influence at the court of the Vatican. And he—— But what vain fancy was he revelling in? Leolin Pomeroy, with a sharp word and a groan, bent his head on the table in gloomy discontent.

He knew not how long he remained thus. A gentle hand stole round his neck and aroused him. It was his wife.

“Leolin, my dearest, why need you care?” she whispered. “I am only thankful that it did not happen before, or they might have separated us.”

His face flushed. “Anna—what are you speaking of? what have you heard?”

“I have heard all. That you are not the inheritor, and that the abbey is not our own home——”

“No,” he interrupted. “Enemies are trying to turn us from it.”

“But, Leolin, we may laugh at them: they cannot part us.”

“How did you learn the news?”

“Mrs. Pomeroy came to the garden and told me.”

Leolin very nearly swore at Mrs. Pomeroy. “My dear wife! it is for your sake that I could curse the tidings.”

She kissed away the words, her shy eyes drooping. "Oh, Leolin, they may take everything from me, so they leave me only you."

"I don't believe they can take it from us," spoke Leolin. "There must be some mistake—some flaw in the matter. I am sure of it."

"Flaw in what?" she asked. "In the marriage of this lady who has just come here? Do you mean that, Leolin?"

"I do. And I will take very good care to search it out and prove it."

"Oh, Leolin, you will not do anything harsh or unjust," she pleaded. "If this little boy is heir by right, you must not try to displace him. It would not bring happiness to you or to me."

"You don't understand the case, Anna," said Leolin, some annoyance in his tone.

"No, dear, I dare say not; I am not wise. I only understand—that the wealth and the grandeur we thought were our own, are not so. But we can be quite as happy in a cottage as in this great abbey—if you can only think so."

"But I can't think so, Anna."

"Will you try, Leolin? And please let us be just to this little lad and his mother; and generous as well as just. I am quite sure," she added, shyly, "that as we act by others, so shall we ourselves be dealt by in return: that is one of the unalterable decrees of Heaven. Papa has ever taught me so."

Leolin ended the conversation. His wife's ideas upon the matter seemed hardly worth refuting. Leolin Pomeroy meant to act; not argue.

Meanwhile he found himself temporarily obliged to submit to adverse fate. Upon no plea could he declare that the marriage had been illegal, and for the present this new Lady of Pomeroy must remain at the abbey. Were he to attempt to put her forth she might call in the powers of the law, and Leolin would certainly be worsted.

"Alice, what is the truth of this strange report that I hear?" demanded a short, stout woman, plunging uncere-

moniously that self-same evening into the drawing-room of Mrs. Pomeroy.

Alice rose. Mrs. Wylde sank into a chair—and it was Mrs. Wylde, though the reader may fail at this first moment to recognize her. For Mrs. Wylde has been growing stouter and stouter all these years, and shorter in proportion, until she now looks like nothing but a round dumpling. And her face grows red, and she seems ever in a flurry; but her attire is not less gay than of yore, and as she sits down now she unties her white satin bonnet-strings, and begins fanning herself with a painted fan that has real pearls embedded in its handle. At the other end of the room, playing at fox-and-goose on a little ivory board, sat Mary Pomeroy and her governess, Miss Lorne.

Alice explained. It appeared that Leolin had never really come into the inheritance. The true lord was a little fellow of nearly eight years old, George's son. And his mother was Sybilla Gaunt, against whom so much had been said in the days gone by.

Mrs. Wylde lifted her head quickly, causing the white plumes to vibrate. She could be very indignant when she liked; and she was so now. "Sybilla Gaunt!"

So Mrs. Pomeroy explained further. *That* had all been a mistake. Sybilla was the Lady of Pomeroy. She had been George Pomeroy's wife from the first—and some of the Pomeroy's had known it at the time, and the old lord had sanctioned it.

Mrs. Wylde could find no words to express her feelings. Fanning herself violently, the feathers shook again. In the midst of the stormy silence, Miss Mary Pomeroy, having lost the game at fox-and-goose, upset the dainty board with a crash, and sprang forward.

"Why have you come here so late as this, grandmamma?"

"I came to see your mamma. And I think it high time that little girls should be in bed."

"I am not ready to go to bed," said Mary. "Miss Lorne promised me two games at fox-and-goose to-night, and we have only had one. Grandmamma, do you know that Uncle Leolin is not the Lord of Pomeroy?"

"Only to hear of such a thing is sufficiently exasperating," said Mrs. Wyld.

"It is Uncle Leolin who is exasperated," returned the child in her wise fashion; and, in truth, she sometimes made remarks that seemed wonderful. "My cousin Rupert is the young lord, and his mother is to be the new lady. Mamma says she likes her better than Lady Anna. I like her too: and I like Rupert."

Mrs. Wyld felt very much tempted to declare *her* opinion of the young lord, and especially of his mother, but the young lady's presence prevented her from doing so. She sat on and fanned her red face violently, growing more and more angry and indignant.

Households were organized at the abbey. Mrs. Pomeroy retained her own rooms; Leolin and his wife retained theirs; Sybilla established herself in the south wing. Until, as she had intimated, tidings should reach them of the true lord's death: when she might feel it incumbent to make a change. Anything more absurd than this chivalrous feeling towards Rupert had never, Leolin thought, been entertained by woman.

Seated in one of the rooms of the south wing was the Lady of Pomeroy in her gossamer widow's cap; and with her her sister-in-law, Joan. Tidings of the strange complications which had arisen, in the appearance of this little lad, Rupert, were written by Leolin to his sister Joan, who was then staying on the Continent with Mr. and Mrs. Capel. As soon as she could conveniently do so, Joan returned to England and came on to the abbey. She was looking older than her years justified: Guy's dreadful death, the stain upon the Pomeroy name, which that death and the circumstances conducing to it entailed, had told upon Joan. It was an ever-present trouble which could not be lifted.

Twice, during the intervening years, had Joan Pomeroy sojourned at the abbey; not with Mrs. Pomeroy, but visiting, if it may be said, the absent lord; occupying his apartments, waited on by his servants. Her chief motive, in coming, was to see Guy's child, of whom she was very fond. *This*

time, she stayed with Sybilla. Unlike Leolin, she warmly embraced the new changes at once: welcomed Sybilla as a sister; loved at first sight the little Rupert. For a long time past, Joan had felt convinced, that whatever might be the mystery attending the disappearance of Sybilla, no disgrace could attach to her.

"But I still maintain that you acted unwisely, Sybilla," she was saying to-day, when they were conversing on the past. "I now understand George's motives for secrecy; it was right to respect them; but to his own family and to your father he might have declared the truth. As he did not do this, you ought to have done so—for your own sake."

"It would have put George all wrong with his colonel," replied Sybilla. "Over and over again, during that trying period when I was waiting here to join my husband, have I felt tempted to speak. Next to deceiving my dear father, the greatest trouble I had to bear was that you could think ill of me."

"You might have made your father an exception; have told him of the intended marriage."

Sybilla shook her head. "In his devotion to your family, he might have deemed it his duty to stop it: in his love for me, he might have insisted that I should be married openly, or not at all. George and I talked it over anxiously, and he decided that it would not be prudent to speak. All the arrangements were George's; I fell in with them; but I did beg him to at least tell you, and he would not do so."

"You cared for George very much, I suppose?"

A deep blush stole to Sybilla's beautiful face. "No one, except himself, knew how much, or ever will know, Joan. As to George, I believe he had loved me from the time I was a girl of fifteen or sixteen; and his frequent visits here, after he joined the army, were made for my sake. The marriage was not kept an absolute secret, Joan: as soon as my father knew of it, he insisted upon its being disclosed in confidence to the Lady Abbess and to Sister Mildred. Father Andrew went over and told them about it."

Joan Pomeroy threw her thoughts back to the past.

"They always seemed to take your part at the convent, Sybilla. I remarked that."

"They had known me for a modest maiden, who strove to do her duty humbly before Heaven; and they could not believe, even before they were enlightened, that I should suddenly become unworthy," spoke Sybilla earnestly, but half-laughing and wholly blushing. "Well, it was hard to bear, I say, the world's condemnation; but I would go through all again for my dear husband's sake."

"If George did not choose to disclose it to us at the time, I wonder he did not do so later. It must have been known in India that you were his wife—to his brother-officers and to many friends."

"Assuredly it was. We both thought, he and I, that it would be time enough to declare it when we came over to England. To tell you the truth, Joan, I feared that the avowal, if it preceded ourselves, might make it somewhat unpleasant for my father."

"I saw Mr. Hildyard as I came through London," Joan resumed, passing from the subject.

"And the lost letter from India—has he received it yet?" asked Sybilla, eagerly.

"No; he says he has neither had it, nor heard of it."

"I cannot understand how that can be."

"Mr. Hildyard is thoroughly truthful, Sybilla."

"Oh yes; I know that. Only it seems so strange that that most important letter should have miscarried, when the letter to my father, posted with it, arrived safely."

"You are sure they were posted together?"

"Quite sure. Major Barkley posted them himself: Moore was with him."

"Major Barkley? George's great friend—was he not?"

"The greatest friend he had in the world. It was Major Barkley who wrote the letter—which was full of confidential details—to Mr. Hildyard. A short note, written by George in his dying hour, was also enclosed in it."

"Letters do get lost unaccountably, sometimes," observed Joan. "It was an unfortunate thing in this instance, on account of Leolin."

"Very, very unfortunate," murmured Sybilla. "His feeling towards me is not a kindly one. And he has never seen my father since my return."

"He will get over that," said Joan, calmly. "Disappointments of that nature require time to soften them. But, Sybilla, speaking of your father—what is it I hear about his illness?"

Close upon the arrival of Sybilla, John Gaunt was taken seriously ill. He had been unwell for some time previously, but had not paid much attention to it. Upon getting worse, he sent for Mr. Norris. The doctor was concerned at the symptoms displayed: they were most ominous. Since then Gaunt had been in bed, slowly dying. Dr. Bill came every other day from Owlstone, and Sybilla passed much of her time at the lodge.

"Does he himself fear that it may terminate fatally?" breathed Joan.

"He knows it, Joan; fear it, I am sure he does not. He said to me yesterday, 'It seems, my dear, as if God had only spared me to see you return with your little son!' And, when I burst into tears, he bade me remember that our true home was not here, but in that heaven to which we are all hastening."

"I should like to see him," said Joan, gently. "You must let me go with you this afternoon."

But, ere the afternoon had well set in, the abbey was disturbed by a message from the keeper's lodge. Gaunt was dying. It was the doctor who brought it. He first of all apprised the Lady of Pomeroy, and then made his way to Leolin. The latter, lingering moodily at one of the front-windows, had watched the doctor's approach to the abbey.

"What a pace you came at, Norris!" was his greeting. "Were you walking for a wager?"

"John Gaunt is dying; he will not, I fear, live through the day," was the surgeon's grave answer. "He wishes you to go and see him."

"I will not go," replied Leolin.

In the course of the day Leolin had another appeal—this

time from Father Andrew. For once in his life the priest's good-humoured face was as serious as a judge's.

"Don't let Gaunt die, my son, asking for you in vain. He is most anxious to see you. The wishes of the dying should be held sacred. What has Gaunt done to you?"

"What has he not done?" retorted Leolin. "He has helped in a conspiracy to wrest my lawful inheritance from me."

"That is just your erroneous way of looking at matters. Your brother George's marriage and the birth of this son wrests, as you term it, the inheritance from you. Gaunt knew nothing of the marriage."

"Surely, Father Andrew, you need not take Gaunt's part to my face?"

"I take the part of common sense. Gaunt's behaviour throughout has been admirable—yes, Leolin, I repeat it, *admirable*. Look how some men, knowing, all these years, that their daughter was Lady of Pomeroy, would have presumed upon it. But has Gaunt ever presumed? Has he not been modest, retiring, reticent? No, Leolin, Gaunt has never injured you, or sought to do so."

"*I won't see him*," said Leolin. "That's the second denial I have sent him to-day. Let him content himself with his grandson."

"A brave little fellow, if they can only get some flesh on his bones," remarked the priest, opening his snuff-box, as he retired and left Leolin to his obstinacy.

But, at the twilight hour, when softness unconsciously steals over us, Leolin repented of his obduracy, and set out for the lodge. He had already reached the turning to it when he saw the priest come forth.

"Is he worse, father?"

"Only in that he is weaker—and, my son, I am glad to see you here. He will not last out the night: and I am on my way to prepare and bring him the last sacraments."

John Gaunt, soon to be no more, lay on his bed, the dew-drops of coming death already rising on his once noble face—a face sadly worn and weakened now. A lively expression of gratitude, of welcome, illumined it as Leolin entered.

The young lord leaned on the bed by his grandfather's side, half in fear, half in curiosity; Sybilla sat at a little distance; Joan was in the next room.

"I could not die without seeing you," began Gaunt, holding out both his hands to Leolin. "This late estrangement on your part has been very painful to me. I feel that I have not deserved it. No one has been more grieved than I that the child should supplant you—but it lies not in my power, or in any one's power, to alter it."

Leolin muttered something that was inaudible, and drew away his hand.

"You are the only brother left of the four," spoke Gaunt again, after recovering his breath. "You will protect my daughter and her child—George's child."

"I will not recognize the child as the chief of Pomeroy," deliberately replied Leolin.

"He is chief of Pomeroy, whether you recognize him or not," panted Gaunt. "I was not speaking of their rights; they are beyond your power to disturb; I was thinking of kindness. George is dead; by to-morrow I shall be dead; and none will be near them to afford protection, or to whisper a word of comfort, excepting yourself."

"The boy would take my inheritance from me," sullenly repeated Leolin, who in truth thought no man had ever been so wronged as he. "I tell you openly—for I disdain to work in secret—that I do not consider my brother George's marriage was right or legal; I will do what I can to get it annulled."

Gaunt, struggling with his weakness, and with a feeling of aversion to the sentiments, of almost horror that they should be avowed by any man pretending to be a Christian, lifted his head from the pillow and supported himself on his elbow. He solemnly raised his hand in a warning attitude, and spoke in tones that thrilled those who listened to him.

"Beware, Leolin Pomeroy. For your own sake, I pray you, beware. You cannot sin deliberately before Heaven, and remain unvisited for it. One sad judgment has already fallen on your family; do not you act so as to provoke another. *As you deal by this child, so may you prosper in*

your own children!—and take heed how you despise the warning of a dying man.”

He fell back exhausted. Sybilla rose to administer some medicine; and Leolin Pomeroy, frightfully disturbed, went forth into the night-air.

CHAPTER VI.

WHISPERED NEWS.

Cold weather was coming in early. It could scarcely be called autumn yet, for September was only passing; but a fire burnt in the breakfast-room at Lord Essington's, in Berkeley Square: a small back-room that somehow looked dull even in sunshine. The earl would have preferred to breakfast in a lighter and pleasanter room, but his wife decreed otherwise; and in most things she was master and mistress also.

On a footstool close to the fender, roasting one side of her pretty and delicate face, sat a child of some four years old, simply dressed in a cotton frock and white pinafore. Her small feet, encased in their shoes and socks, were stretched out on the hearthrug, her bright curls were kept back with blue ribbon, and her light-brown eyes, large, lustrous, and singularly soft, were bent over the wax doll upon her lap. A large wax doll, with fair flowing curls and turquoise eyes, that had been the gift of Leolin Pomeroy. You have not forgotten little Annaline Hetley. Things were anything but flourishing at her home, so far as Captain Hetley's finances were concerned; and the good-natured earl had kept the child on, rather to the discomfiture of his wife and daughters. Quiet though she was, never putting herself in their way, they considered her presence a trouble.

Footsteps, descending the stairs, caught the child's ear. Running to deposit the doll on a chair behind the window curtain, Annaline ran back and disappeared with the foot-

stool under the table. Lady Geraldine opened the door at the moment, and advanced to the fire. The child's curls came peeping out from under the breakfast-cloth, as Geraldine crossed the rug, causing her to start back to avoid treading on her.

"You tiresome little—toad!" cried Geraldine. "How dare you hide yourself to frighten people?"

"I was only putting the stool for Lady Essington," pleaded the child in her imperfect tongue. "She likes to have it, you know."

"Well, don't do it again," retorted Geraldine.

The next to come in was the earl. He lifted the child on his knee and kissed her. He would have kept the child always; but they were purposing to go from London on the morrow, and she was to be sent home to her father and mother. The illness of his son, Lord Cardine, had detained them at home since Anna's marriage.

"Is my little girl ready to go back to mamma?" asked the earl, keeping her fresh cheek close to his own withered one.

"Oh, please let me!" she answered, putting her hand round his neck by way of enhancing the petition. "And you will come too!"

"Wish I could," cried the earl: and he rose to seat her in the chair that was placed beside his own.

"Your last breakfast here, Annaline," remarked the countess, grimly, when all were seated, and the meal was beginning. "I hope you feel grateful for the very long and pleasant visit you have been allowed to make here."

"Yes," said the child, very imperfectly understanding: or probably not understanding at all. "Franky shall——"

"Halloa!" broke in the earl. He had opened the letter that lay beside his plate, and was reading the contents—only a line or two. "Pomeroy and Anna are coming up to-day."

"Impossible!" cried Lady Essington.

But Leolin wrote that he had to visit London for a day or two on business; must see Mr. Hildyard; and should bring Anna with him. They should break the journey by sleeping

a night at Henry Capel's house, which was within an hour of London by rail, and arrive early on Wednesday morning.

"I must say it is tiresome!" cried the countess. "And most of our things packed! When are we to get away, I wonder."

"Tiresome!" cried the earl. "It is the most pleasant surprise we could have had. Never mind about getting away. If I did as I liked, I should stay here and not go away at all."

"Don't you think, papa, that we might as well settle down here for the winter?" put in Geraldine, in as sarcastic a tone as she dared use to her father. "It's just like Anna; no consideration for any one but herself."

"If you were half as considerate for others as Anna is, it would be better for you, Geraldine," said the earl, smiling at her good-naturedly.

Geraldine did not answer. She had been lately in a chronic state of ill-temper. The Duke of St. Ives had not come forward for her, or even for Mabel; no other eligible man, duke or commoner, had done so; and this was Geraldine's third or fourth season.

Before breakfast was digested, Leolin and his wife arrived. Shut up with the earl in his study, Leolin disclosed that his business was to consult with Mr. Hildyard as to the steps to be taken to dissolve the marriage contracted by his brother George, and displace the young child Rupert.

About a fortnight had elapsed since Gaunt's death. Sybilla had now appointed another agent, or steward, to manage the property; one James Knox. He was distantly related to Charles Knox of the Knoll, who had aspired to the hand of Mrs. Pomeroy, but was in a humbler condition of life. Gaunt, knowing his capability, and his sterling integrity, had recommended him to Sybilla before his death. Sybilla appointed him, and gave him the lodge, her father's old dwelling, to live in. All this, so demonstrative of Sybilla's power, of her right, only fanned the flame of resentment nourished by Leolin. His sense of injury grew almost unbearable; he intended to move heaven and earth, rather than not dispossess Rupert.

Lord Essington listened in silence to what Leolin had to say. In fact, the latter was so vehement in enlarging upon his wrongs, that the earl had no chance of speaking.

"*Don't do it,*" he said at length, as Leolin came to a pause, after promising that he should at once move the Vatican. "Don't attempt it. So far as I have been able to gather, this marriage was a just and proper marriage, certainly legal, and the child is as much master of Pomeroy as his father was before him. Unfair dealing never answers, Leolin; it seldom answers in this world, and it will not avail us in the next. Had I ever oppressed a poor or a weak man for my own benefit, I could not die in peace."

"But if you had been wronged, sir?" cried Leolin. "If you had had your estates wrested from you by a usurper, would you not do all you could to win them back again?"

"Yes; but the cases are not parallel, Leolin. Your own succession was a mistake. Had you known of this child, you would not have assumed the honours. You could not have done so."

Leolin was silent. He hardly knew what he should have done.

"Put the case fairly to yourself," pursued Lord Essington, who was pacing the room as he talked, while Leolin sat back in an easy-chair. "Were you chief of Pomeroy, and left a son behind you, how should you like for a younger brother of yours to usurp title and estate, and displace your child? What would you think of it?"

"About *my* son there could, I hope, be no such discussion," haughtily spoke Leolin.

"Your brother George may have said the same during his lifetime. But you are shirking the question. Would you not say the brother who wanted to put himself in before your son was the usurper?"

"I don't know," declared Leolin. "But do you not see to what this reduces us?" he added, with a flushed face. "I am no better off than I was as an attaché. I can return to that at any time; and with advanced prospects, I dare say: Lord C—— was pleased to say, when I left, that he knew my value; but what of that? I have a wife now."

"Happiness does not lie in riches."

"I had hoped that you would join me in appealing to Rome, that the marriage might be annulled."

"That I never will," said Lord Essington, decidedly, a slight frown on his brow. "Neither will you, I hope. There would be no more justice in your seeking to annul that marriage, than in some one else's seeking to annul yours. But now as to the future, Leolin. You have two courses open to you in this dilemma," remarked Lord Essington. "The one is, to return to diplomacy; the other, to remain at the abbey—as the new Lady of Pomeroy wishes you to do. I should counsel the former course——"

"No," interrupted Leolin. "For the present I shall remain at Pomeroy, so that my time may be my own."

"As you please. You will go back to diplomacy, I dare say, when you grow tired of being idle. Your income, yours and Anna's combined, amounts to very little more than a thousand a-year, I believe."

"About that," assented Leolin.

"Well, in trouble of this kind, brought about by no fault of yours, it is the duty of friends and relatives to help when they can. I cannot do much; you know how extravagant my son is: but I will allow you a thousand a-year until your fortunes mend. Only—not a word of this to any living mortal, except Anna. Mind that. You must not chatter to my wife."

"How good you are!" exclaimed Leolin, deeply touched by the earl's generosity. "I hope we shall soon cease to need your help."

"That will make your income two thousand a-year: somewhat more. And, while you stay at the abbey, you will, at any rate, live rent-free; if you take up diplomacy again, you will be paid for it. And now, you had better submit to the inevitable with a good grace, Leolin," concluded the earl, rising, and bringing the interview to a close. "

But Leolin had not the least intention of following this advice, though he did not say so. Taking his hat, he went forth to the offices of Hildyard and Prael.

Anna, meanwhile, was with her mother in the breakfast-

room, conversing upon this same all-engrossing topic—the unhappy change of circumstances at Pomeroy. Not that Anna looked unhappy: her face was fresh, her smile bright. Lord Essington entered the room.

“What is this new Lady of Pomeroy like, Anna?” he asked.

“She is very nice and charming, papa,” was Anna’s answer. “Quite a regal-looking woman, with a beautiful and refined face.”

“Is she educated?”

“Oh yes. Her education was the same as that of the Miss Pomeroy. She was brought up at the same convent.”

“And she is well descended?”

“Quite so. In that respect, I am told, quite the equal of the Pomeroy.”

“Then what in the world is your husband making all this fuss for? Saying he shall try to get her marriage annulled?”

“The Gaunts were poor, you see, papa, and inferior in position. John Gaunt was gamekeeper to the old Lord of Pomeroy. In the village he was called the ‘gentleman-keeper,’ because he did not accept pay for his office. His daughter was of course not equal in position to George Pomeroy.”

“George Pomeroy might have made a worse marriage, I take it.”

“By a great deal. She is so good and kind, so considerate in all she does. I think she is quite as sorry as we are that Leolin should be displaced—but what, as she says, can she do, except maintain the rights of her son? Leolin will remain for the present at the abbey; he has more right to it, he thinks, than she has. But he will not touch any of the revenues, as she wishes him to do. He says he will have all or none.”

“Quite right; it shows his spirit,” put in Lady Essington.”

“Quite wrong,” dissented the earl. “He has no more right to the revenues of Pomeroy, or to the abbey now, than I have. You must see that, Anna?”

"I have seen it from the first," replied Anna. "To dispossess this child would be a cruel wrong. I trust that Leolin will soon see it in the same light also; but my speaking only vexes him."

In the fleetest cab that Leolin could find, he made his way to Lincoln's Inn. Hardly giving Mr. Hildyard time to greet him, he plunged into the point he had at heart.

"This wretched marriage, of my brother George's, that has come to light. The Court of Rome must be appealed to to annul it, Hildyard."

The lawyer looked at him, and paused. "Upon what plea?"

"What plea!—every plea," chafed Leolin. "A low marriage of that nature, solemnized in secret, ought not to be allowed to stand."

"Pardon me. I hear that the lady, now Lady of Pomeroy, is in every respect worthy of her position: in beauty, intellect, and goodness."

"How did you hear that?"

"From your sister, Miss Joan Pomeroy."

"Oh, Joan! Joan was always fascinated by Sybilla Gaunt. Any way, you will have to take my instructions in the matter, Hildyard."

"I still fail to see upon what plea you would proceed."

"No plea is needed; our Church can make its own pleas, you know. Will you take my instructions, or will you not?"

"As you please. If I decline, you will only carry them elsewhere, I suppose. But it is an unjust thing to do, Mr. Leolin."

"Unjust! Is it just, think you, to allow a stray child, never before heard of, to crop up, and oust me out of home and fortune?"

Mr. Hildyard sighed. "It has been most unfortunate altogether, and I have felt it almost as keenly as you. Had the same mail that brought tidings of your brother's death brought also the news that he had left a son, you would not have been subjected to this disappointment. But to have assumed the honours and the property, and to have married

thinking them yours, and then to find that all must be taken from you, is indeed a blow hard to bear."

"What became of that letter that they say was written to you?"

"I wish I knew. All I do know is, that it never reached me. Better that the other had been lost than that was posted with it—the one announcing George's death."

"George made a will, I believe," continued Leolin. "Do you know what its provisions were?"

"Yes. His wife takes all, excepting a legacy to his servant, Moore, and to one or two other people. The all is not much. It is under four thousand pounds."

"Under four thousand pounds!" echoed Leolin, in astonishment. "Was that all George had saved?"

"It appears to be all he had to leave."

"Then what became of the money? He could not have spent a tithe of his income since he came into Pomeroy. They lived in the quietest and most retired manner possible over there, as I am given to understand."

"I fancy they did so."

"What did George do with his money, I ask?"

"It is more than I can tell you. I only know that his revenues were transmitted to him duly and regularly."

"He ought to have died worth—oh, something like twenty or thirty thousand pounds, spending so little as I hear they did spend."

Mr. Hildyard shook his head. The question had more than once occurred to himself, and he had felt a little puzzled over it. "That is all your brother left behind him," he observed aloud. "What he did with the rest, I know not."

Leolin took out his watch. He had not come to waste his interview in desultory gossip; and Mr. Hildyard, much against his will, had to listen to instructions and suggestions on the scheme of annulling the marriage.

"There is one thing I wish to mention to you," observed Mr. Hildyard, in lowered tones, when Leolin was preparing to depart. "But, first of all, let me ask whether you have heard anything lately of your brother?"

"Which brother?"

"There is only one left now—Rupert."

"Nothing. Except that George's widow says he is not dead. It seems that George used to receive a letter from him now and then. She thinks he hides himself in desert places unfrequented by man."

"I fear he is in England."

"In England!" cried Leolin, turning cold with dread.

"I do fear so. And, oh, how imprudent it is! But Rupert was always careless. Were he discovered, the consequences might be—terrible."

Leolin could not speak. His heart felt faint within him. "How do you know?" he presently asked. "*What* do you know?"

"I will tell you. A confidential clerk of mine, Collins—you must remember him, by the way; a thin tall man in spectacles, middle-aged——"

"Yes, yes, I know Collins," impatiently interrupted Leolin.

"He was in Spain lately, on some private business of mine. Coming back he, for certain reasons, took passage on board a small Spanish trader, which he expected to find untenanted—except by the Spanish crew. However, when he had been a day at sea, he found that she carried another passenger: a sick gentleman, he was told, who kept himself shut up in his private cabin. One night, shortly before reaching Falmouth, to which port they were bound, the vessel came in contact with a steamer; she was thought to be sinking; and, in the confusion, this passenger came leaping up on deck. It was Rupert."

"Heaven help him!" cried Leolin.

"Collins knew him at once. He wore no hat; and the moon, very bright that night, shone full upon his face. It was worn and pale; but it was Rupert's. Catching sight of Collins, he seemed to recognize him, and instantly dived down again to his cabin. The vessel reached Falmouth in safety, and there Collins left it."

"And Rupert landed?"

"Little doubt of that. Why else should he have made the passage?"

"I wonder if his troubles have turned his brain? Only a madman would attempt to come here under the circumstances. Why, Collins might have taken him there and then. Is he to be trusted?" added Leolin.

"Who?—Collins?" As you would trust myself. Collins confided the matter to me; but he will never speak of it elsewhere."

"How long is this ago?"

"Not above ten days."

Leolin lifted his hands in alarm. "Why—he may be in England now! Can I see Collins?"

"If you like. I will call him in."

The clerk appeared. A grave, composed man, who took off his spectacles while he spoke.

"Don't you think you may have been mistaken?" urged Leolin, when a few words had passed between them, his tone one of intense pain. "I cannot believe it was my brother Rupert. Rash though he was by nature, he could scarcely have been rash enough for that."

"It was certainly he, and no other," affirmed the clerk, his whisper impressive. "I could not be mistaken in Mr. Rupert Pomeroy."

"You were well acquainted with him?"

"Quite well, sir. We had a good deal of business to do for him when he got into the Queen's Bench, and I knew him as well as it is possible to know any one. I recognized him the moment he came on deck."

"You may trust Collins in all ways," observed Mr. Hildyard, as the clerk withdrew. "Rest assured it was your brother Rupert. I thought it right to inform you of this, Mr. Leolin. What his object can be in coming here and running into danger, I know not."

Leolin Pomeroy went back to Berkeley Square in a state of mental confusion. If his unhappy brother should be taken, what on earth would become of their good name?—to what disgrace might it not be brought!

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE CHAPEL.

IN the small round room of the south tower, appropriated to the studies of the young Rupert Pomeroy, sat that little gentleman himself, with his governess, one fine morning in November. Short though the period of his stay hitherto had been at Pomeroy—only three months in all—Rupert seemed to have improved wonderfully. The sickly look had left his face: health and strength were returning to him. It seemed that the child had only needed European air to restore him: and the fears expressed by his mother to Leolin, that he would not be long here, were rapidly passing away.

When Rupert began to grow better, one of the first acts of Sybilla had been to inquire after a governess. In India she had taught him herself. The governess was soon found: a Miss Haberdale. A staid lady of some five-and-thirty years, great in modern languages and accomplishments, had also Latin and Greek at her finger's ends; just the governess for the young Lord. Rupert soon grew fond of her: he was affectionate, docile, and clever. He and his mother had settled down in the south wing and tower. Mrs. Pomeroy remained in one portion of the front pile; and Leolin Pomeroy with his wife occupied the other portion and the north wing. But this, I think, has already been stated.

Leolin could not keep up the state he would have observed had he been the lord, but he was almost so regarded. He and Lady Anna were much visited, and visited in return. Sybilla was glad that it should be so. Whilst she wore deep widow's weeds, and whilst her son was so young and delicate, she declined visiting on her own account. As to Leolin, when he was not out shooting, or fishing, or dining, he was busy in his library over his favourite scheme of dispossessing his nephew. It appeared to have taken absolute hold upon him; to have become, in fact, little short of a mania. In the one thing of not accept-

ing any of the Pomeroy revenues Leolin was honourable. Whilst he was plotting against Sybilla and her son, he would not receive her favours.

Nothing more had come of that startling communication made to Leolin by Mr. Hildyard—the arrival of Rupert Pomeroy in the Spanish barque. Whether Rupert had sunk into the earth on landing on British ground, whether he had vanished into air, or whether—as was probable—he had thought better of the rash act he was perpetrating, and had hidden himself within the vessel again, and sailed away with her when she departed, certain it was that no sign or news came from him or of him. The terrible uneasiness it had brought to Leolin was gradually subsiding. He did begin to hope that this most reckless and criminal brother had again made his escape for good. There were moments when Leolin thought what a mercy it would be to hear of Rupert's death.

Miss Haberdale, a small, fair woman, her light hair braided back from her quiet face, her dress as neat as herself, sat at the head of the small square table; Rupert was opposite to her, “doing dictation.” Just now it was English dictation. The child was very thin still; but anything more beautiful than his refined face as he lifted it, and the intelligence in his violet eyes, could not be seen. He wore a black velvet tunic, a white cambric collar with a plaited frill.

“In the field we saw a hare,” read Miss Haberdale; and Rupert repeated the words after her as he wrote them. “The hare was——”

An interruption. The room-door opened, and in rushed Miss Mary Pomeroy.

“Now!” exclaimed the governess, displeased, “how often have I told you, Mary, that you are *not* to come to these rooms during lesson time? I cannot allow it.”

Miss Haberdale had cause to speak. Mary Pomeroy was a great deal fonder of being in the Lady of Pomeroy's wing than of remaining in her own. But for the influence on both sides, she would have been there always.

“I have nothing to do, so I have come here.” announced

Mary, defiantly. "I have come for the whole day. Mamma called after me, but I did not listen."

"Miss Lorne is following to take you back again, I hope."

"Miss Lorne's gone," said Mary triumphantly. "Her father's very ill; she had a letter to say so; and she is gone home for a week to nurse him. Croft is driving her to Owlstone. I shall stay here with Rupert all the time that I have no lessons to do."

"I think then, as Miss Lorne is away, that you had better bring your books and do your lessons with me."

"I think *not*," dissented the young lady. "You are not my governess, Miss Haberdale, and I want a holiday."

"Very well. Then I must beg of you to leave the room."

Miss Haberdale had a way of exacting obedience, and Mary knew it. But she was very unwilling to go; she liked her own will and way.

"No," dissented Miss Haberdale, decisively. "Not unless you get your slate and do dictation with us. If you are good, perhaps I may ask you to dine with Rupert."

It ended in the young lady's bringing her slate. The prospect of dining with Rupert was too powerful to be resisted.

In the afternoon the two children went out together attended by Bridget. The day, so bright in the morning, had become overcast. The skies were leaden; but the air was still and mild, almost warm. The day was already declining.

Running down the stairs, they crossed the cloisters to the quadrangle, the way of entrance to the south wing; passed through the abbey gates, and turned to the right. "I am going to see old Jerome," announced Mary, in her authoritative manner.

Away flew the children towards the keep, Bridget after them. Bridget, passionately fond of Miss Mary Pomeroy, gave in to most of her whims without a murmur, and suffered herself to be led anywhere. Arrived before the door of the keep, Mary seized the bell-handle and rang a

prolonged peal; her usual mode of announcing herself. Old Jerome, looking sadder and greyer than of yore, opened the door.

It admitted them into a small recess, and thence to the lower room: the same room where that foolish Lady of Pomeroy, Mary's mother, had used to sit on the stone ledge, talking to Rupert. The room was furnished now, and was Jerome's kitchen. He placed chairs for the children, he and Bridget remaining standing.

"My governess has gone away for a week, Jerome. Are you glad?"

"Very glad, Miss Mary, if you are. And how, sir, is the lady to-day?"

"Oh, she's very well," said Mary, giving Rupert no time to answer. "I dined there to-day. Jerome, we can see your keep if we put our heads out at the windows of the south wing."

"Ay, I know that, Miss Mary. Knew it before you were born."

"How old you must be!" exclaimed the young lady. "And, Jerome, did you like the large piece of plum-pudding I made Bridget bring you yesterday?"

"It was rare and good, Miss Mary. Bless your little heart for thinking of your father's old servant!"

"You were my grandpapa's servant," corrected Miss Mary.

"Ay, and your papa's, my dear. I am your papa's servant ever—faithful to his memory."

"I am going upstairs," proclaimed Mary; and, without waiting for permission, she darted to the door that opened upon the narrow staircase.

The children ascended the winding stone stairs. A door on the right led them into a room that Jerome called his parlour. It was tolerably well furnished, with a carpet, some books, and other things for comfort. The deep window, not much more than a loophole, looked towards the abbey, and had a distant view of the sea. Above this were two other rooms, in the smaller of which Jerome slept. He seldom used the parlour, contenting himself with the lower

room, the narrow casement of which gave him a view of the open country and the pine forest in the distance.

Restlessly anxious to be moving, Mary led the way down, said good-bye to Jerome, and left the keep. Her quick eye caught sight of something unusual at the door of the chapel.

"Look, Rupert, at that truck. What are they going to do? I shall run and see."

A small marble tablet was about to be placed on the south wall inside the chapel, to the memory of George Pomeroy. Sybilla had given orders for it when she returned, and it was now ready to be fixed. The men, charged with the business, had brought a truck full of articles that would be required for the work on the morrow, and had left it at the door.

The children entered the chapel, Rupert reverently doffing his straw hat, and both crossing themselves with the holy water. Their further progress was arrested by Bridget, who caught Mary by the arm.

"You can't want anything in this gloomy chapel, Miss Mary. I don't like it when it's empty. And we shall have no walk. Master Rupert, please to come back."

Mary's only answer was to break from Bridget and pull Rupert forward. Down deep, underneath the principal aisle, lay the remains of Mary's father. The children trod reverently, and halted when they came to the stone that covered him; a flat stone let in smoothly to the flags, the initials of his name, and the date of his death alone cut into it.

But on the wall to the right, between the white marble tablet that recorded the death of the old lord and the spot where the one to the memory of George was about to be placed, rested the tablet to Guy. Mary read it aloud. Rupert, holding her hand, was gazing about him with awe—that awe of all things sacred, to which his mother had trained him—but he cast his eyes up at the gilded letters as soon as she began to read. The inscription was in Latin; but the child read it correctly and understood it as well as Father Andrew himself. Translated it would have read as follows:—

"Sacred to the memory of Guy, Lord of Pomeroy; who met with a sudden and violent death on the evening of the seventeenth of October, 18—, in the thirty-first year of his age; and whose mortal remains lie in the vault beneath this chapel. R. I. P." After that, a few lines, expressive of the virtues of the deceased, were added, and of the sorrow of the friends that mourned him.

The shades of evening seemed to be gathering quickly over the chapel, never light in the brightest of days. The sun could not penetrate through its stained windows, some of which represented scenes from the crucifixion. Bridget, standing in the doorway, did her best to recall the children. When the chapel was lighted up with candles, and full of worshippers, Bridget had no objection to making one amongst them, or even to going there periodically to confession, supported by three or four other penitents; but to be in this place, as now, at the close of a gloomy afternoon, where the dead lay at rest—or not at rest—and no one about but these two children, did not please her at all.

If one element was more prevalent within the mind of Bridget Rex than another, it was superstition: and since an unpleasant story had reached her ears a year or two ago, she had not liked the chapel. It seemed to her now to grow more gloomy with every moment.

"But we must go," observed Rupert at length, his quick eyes detecting the signs of uneasiness on the woman's face. That sensitive consideration for the feelings of others, which had characterized George Pomeroy, was possessed by his little son. "I shall go, Mary; Bridget looks as if she were going to cry."

"She's only afraid of the ghost," replied Miss Mary with equanimity.

"What ghost?"

"One they talk about. Bridget saw it once, and if she saw it again she would die; I heard her say so to Mary Lamp."

"But where is the ghost?" persisted Rupert, who was undoubtedly less learned on the subject of ghosts than the young lady herself. "Is it in the chapel here?"

"It is in many places, I think. It is not the nun's that used to haunt the west tower, but another. It must have been a man once, for Bridget calls him 'he;' but she won't tell me about it."

"And would you like to hear?"

"Of course I should. I like to hear about ghosts. They don't frighten me."

Probably because there was nothing more she cared to see or read in the chapel, Mary walked back to Bridget. Glad to get them at any price, Bridget did not scold; but whisked them both as quickly as she could through the inner door. And there they met two workmen coming in.

"Just like you!" ejaculated Bridget to the men. "Going off in the midst of your work! Why can't you stay here and attend to it?"

For, if these men had been about, to impart a little life to the place and courage to herself, Bridget's uneasiness would not have arisen.

Mary announced her intention of going up to see Naomi Rex, and turned off towards the forest. Bridget told her it would be too far; the hour was too late. To which remonstrance she turned a deaf ear.

Past the keep, and the field beyond it, down into the hollow where stood sundry haystacks, went the children, Bridget following them. Bridget did not like that hollow any more than she liked the chapel; and she took hold of Rupert's hand for company, and held it fast until they were well up towards the hill that would take them past Mrs. Wylde's.

Nothing has hitherto been said of a very unpleasant matter that for some time past had been disturbing the equanimity of Pomeroy. But the reader must now hear of it, unwilling though he may be to give ear to a tale of superstition. The Pomeroy household believed that their ill-fated master, Guy, did not rest in his grave.

The retainers at the abbey, and the village in general, given over to sufficient superstition before, were made ten times more timid by the tragical scene in the west tower which had ended the life of Guy. Therefore when dark

rumours arose, and they did arise immediately, that Guy's spirit could not rest, but came abroad to terrify the world, people were only too well prepared to believe it.

Half-a-dozen times, perhaps, in all, and at different periods since his death, had Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, appeared to the living. Such, at least, was their undoubted belief. Singularly to say, the first person to see this apparition was Bridget—unfortunately for her own peace of mind. It was on the night of his funeral: a very few hours after he had been laid in his grave under the chapel. She was passing along this same lonely field-road that she and the children were now traversing, and in the hollow by the hayricks, she saw, or fancied she saw, the dead man. Frightened out of all self-control, Bridget alarmed the neighbourhood with her cries, and declared the cause of her terror. The dead lord had appeared to her.

The commotion that this caused amidst the numerous retainers of the abbey, outdoor and indoor; the uneasiness that took possession of them; the impetus it gave to the superstitious dread, innate in every heart, could not be described. Within a day or two, another servant had seen the same appearance, and in very nearly the same spot; and then the under-keeper, Bardel, a coward in regard to ghosts, was nearly thrown into fits by the same sight. Once or twice since then the apparition had again been seen; the last time being in the chapel, some two years ago.

A respectable man named Cox, who had been head of the servants and custodian of the keys since Jerome resigned, was taking a message to Father Andrew from Miss Pomeroy, then staying at the abbey. It was the seventeenth of October, the fourth anniversary of Guy's death. This man, it should be said, thought nothing of passing along uncanny places at night, and laughed at the credulity of his fellow-servants. Cox reached the priest's, and found he was not at home; old Marget, his housekeeper, thought he might be in the chapel, saying another mass to the many masses that had been said that day, and she bade Cox take the key, if he liked, and let himself in at the front-door.

Father Andrew generally entered by his own little door opening to the vestry, and had his own key to it. Thinking nothing, Cox took the key and walked round to the front-entrance; it was a bright night, and the stars were shining. He unlocked the door, and entered.

The chapel was in darkness; no signs were there of Father Andrew; no mass was being said. All in a moment, as Cox stood just inside, hesitating whether to stumble his way up to the little sacristy, where the priest possibly might be, or to retreat altogether, a faint light dawned in the middle of the chapel, and he saw Guy, the dead Lord of Pomeroy, standing on his own grave. How Cox, in spite of his bravery, got out of the chapel and back to the abbey, he did not say. After all, Father Andrew was at the other end of the village, having gone to the White House to visit a sick servant of Mrs. Wylde's.

These superstitions were troubling the household of Pomeroy; and if a word was now and again allowed to drop in the hearing of quick Miss Mary, perhaps it was somewhat excusable. To Mrs. Pomeroy nothing had been said, and the spirit of her dead husband did not, so far as was known, appear to her; to Leolin no one dared to speak; he would have visited any nonsense of the sort severely; but Joan knew of it, and was as implicit a believer in it as Bridget herself. Was it to be wondered at, poor Joan would wail out in pain to her own heart, that Guy could not rest, dying that miserable death, and unshriven?

The children soon reached the pine forest and the cottage of Naomi Rex lying on its outskirts. Naomi, looking little older than when we last saw her, was taking her tea in the twilight. The children seated themselves at the table, Miss Mary uninvited, and were soon regaling themselves with brown bread and butter.

"You've come up late, my dears," she said.

"A great deal too late," interposed Bridget. "It was Miss Mary's fault, aunt—staying so long in that gloomy chapel."

"I like the chapel," said Mary. "Bridget's only afraid of seeing the ghost. Where's Ann?"

Ann was in the little glade close by, picking up sticks, she was told. And away went the restless child to find Ann, bidding Rupert follow her.

"Who has been talking to the child about the ghost?" abruptly demanded Mrs. Rex, as they disappeared.

"Nobody," confidently asserted Bridget. "She just hears a word, and then makes up the rest in her own mind. She's the quickest and sharpest child you ever knew, Aunt Naomi."

"All the more reason for being careful before her. Don't mention the topic. Never let a child be frightened in its early years."

"It would take a great deal to frighten her," retorted Bridget. "She is as brave as a little lion. As to not speaking of the ghost, we are not likely to do so. We would rather avoid it, especially after the set-down Mr. Leolin gave us."

"What was that?"

"Well, Theresa was going to the White House the other night, with some hurried message from Mrs. Pomeroy; she met me in the cloisters and asked me to go with her. Miss Mary was in bed, and I said I would. 'But not if you take the way through the hollow,' I said to her, unconscious that Mr. Leolin was sitting on a bench in the quadrangle close by, smoking his cigar; 'I dare not go by that place at night for fear of seeing the ghost again;' and we went on talking a bit, so that Mr. Leolin could not fail to hear that it was his brother Guy's ghost, and that it was in the habit of appearing. My word! He spoke to us in his haughty way, calling us no better than children and cowards, and peremptorily forbidding us to believe such absurdity, or ever to speak of it again. After living in the great world—France, and those places—men soon forget what they've been taught. Some of them get to be atheists, it's said."

Mrs. Rex, a staunch believer herself in all the ghosts ever seen or heard of, anxious though she was to keep such topics from children, nodded her head slowly by way of acquiescence.

"The Pomeroy's were brought up in superstition, as it's

named, Bridget; took it in with their mother's milk—how could it be otherwise, with the family's experiences? Mr. Leolin may have lost somewhat of it in the world—but it will come back to him; ay, surely. As to the late lord, poor Mr. Guy, that he does not rest in his grave, I can testify; though why he should come again, or what he wants, is more than I can tell you. I saw him with my own eyes, Bridget."

Next to encountering a ghost one's self, the most dreary of all experiences is to sit in the twilight, and hear a friend assert that he has seen one. Bridget thrilled from head to foot.

"Yes, I saw him," resumed Naomi, her eyes taking a far-off look through the window in the gathering darkness, "and I've never betrayed it yet, Bridget, until now. 'Twas a couple of years, or so, after he died, and I was coming home late one evening from vespers. I could manage to get down to afternoon vespers then, though I can't now. Afterwards, Marget, at Father Andrew's, had asked me in to tea with her, so it made me late. In that narrow glen, just off the lane by Mrs. Wylde's—which I took because it cut off a few yards of the way—I saw him. 'Twas a beautiful light night, and I sat myself down on the stump of a tree for a minute's rest. My head was full of that trouble about your sister's illness; fearing she'd never get better—as it proved, you know—and I'm sure I was no more thinking of Mr. Guy, or of any of the Pomeroy's, than if there had never been such people. All at once as I sat there, silent and still, a tall form sprang up from I know not where, and was close upon me. The moonlight fell on the face; a dead face, Bridget; and I knew it for that of the late lord."

Bridget held her breath.

"Even as I looked, he seemed to vanish. Oh, how fearful it was, that dead face of his! I crawled on here, hardly knowing whether I was dead or alive. Ann wanted to know what had scared me."

"Did you tell her?"

"Tell her? That young girl? I never, till now, told

any one. The air was getting cool, and had chilled me, was all I answered her. She got down the bottle of elder wine, and warmed a little: and my teeth chattered as I drank it."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRAIL BLOSSOM.

"Must you go in to-day, Leolin?"

"My dear, I am anxious for letters."

"But you go in nearly every afternoon, and are so seldom rewarded by finding any letters there. They generally come to you in the morning."

"Some may be there, Anna. I tell you I am anxious."

Anna sighed. She sat in her favourite sitting-room, which was opposite her bed-chamber, her three-weeks'-old baby upon her knee. The little girl was born in July, somewhat less than a year from the period of Anna's marriage. Anna had got through her illness very well, and would have been supremely happy could she have seen Leolin so.

Bending down to his wife's gentle face, he kissed it fondly, stroked the hand of the sleeping baby, and quitted the room. Anna carried her child to the window, and gazed from it to watch him mount his horse, which was waiting. As Leolin rode away, his groom following, he looked up to her, nodded, and raised his hat with a gay smile.

Leolin was going to Owlstone, his chief pilgrimage in an afternoon. His object was to see whether any letters, brought down by the day-mail, waited for him at the post-office: for Abbeyland only had its morning delivery, as of old. You may remember that poor Guy would now and then make the same journey for the same purpose.

Leolin's mania had increased with time. He was in

frequent correspondence with Rome. One of the cardinals, who had known and liked Leolin in the days gone by, had been so won upon by his representations that he took up the cause warmly. And the information as to the English laws, incessantly demanded by letter of Mr. Hildyard, by this same cardinal, or by a man of business representing him, nearly drove the lawyer out of all patience with Leolin.

But Leolin was finding more trouble than he expected in the matter. Other people about the court of the Vatican, quite as influential as this cardinal, were opposed to the scheme. It appeared to be nothing but plot and counter-plot; representations and misrepresentations; if the one side made a successful move, the other side had it repressed. Altogether, Leolin did not prosper: at least, success had not yet come to him. What perhaps added to the difficulties of the case, was the fact that it was being worked out in secret. Correspondence was marked "private and confidential;" letters even came over in cipher, to which Leolin alone possessed the key. The world in general, whether at home or abroad, knew not that Leolin Pomeroy was striving to put aside the young lord in his own favour. That he would eventually triumph, Leolin as fully believed as that the sun shone: and, strange to say, he was persuaded of the justice of his cause. So does self-interest blind us.

He would expound his views to his wife by the hour together, making Anna thoroughly uncomfortable. The more he talked, the clearer grew her sense of the injury he was contemplating, and its terrible injustice. Anna had left off trying to persuade him to see the matter in the right light and to leave George's little son in peace: had she continued to argue, unpleasantness between herself and her husband would have resulted. So silent had she been of late, so passive when Leolin enlarged upon his wrongs, that he thought she was being won over to his cause.

A semblance of civility was kept up between themselves and the Lady of Pomeroy. The two ladies exchanged a formal visit on state occasions. Anna would willingly have been more cordial and intimate, for she very much liked

and respected Sybilla. Mrs. Pomeroy was tolerably sociable with both: as sociable as she had been with any one since Guy's dreadful death. The happiest times were those when Joan was at the abbey; family meetings became more frequent and less formal. Joan had openly declared her sentiments to Leolin, telling him that he ought to be ashamed of himself, and that whilst she was with them she should take care he did not arrest the cordiality that ought to reign between his wife and Sybilla; and that would reign, but for him. One cannot be always wise: Leolin gave in to his sister's freak, and was blind to the tea-drinkings in his own rooms and Sybilla's.

The problem that had puzzled Leolin, as to what became of the money his brother George must have saved, was a problem still. Once he had gone so far as to ask Sybilla. This occurred on an occasion when he went to her, at her own request, about some matter connected with the abbey, on which she wished to have his opinion.

"What did George do with his income?" abruptly demanded Leolin, when their conference was over. "It is not possible that he could have spent it. At least, I imagine not, as he lived so quietly."

"I think he did spend it," calmly replied Sybilla. "I believe he did."

"What in?" asked Leolin, after a pause.

"Indeed I do not know. George did not give an account to me of all he spent."

"Did he put by any of it?"

"Very little, I think."

"But it is inconceivable," persisted Leolin. "He received all the revenues, and left no more behind him than that paltry sum. I cannot understand it."

"And I cannot enlighten you," concluded Sybilla. "The sum left to me was all the money George had to leave—so far as I know."

Of course Leolin could only abandon the question. But it still remained on his mind as a mystery. That she had done something or other with the money herself, he fully believed. But to return to the present.

Anna, standing at the front-window, with her sleeping infant, watched her husband ride down the gentle slope and branch off on the road to Owlstone. A sad look lay in her eyes: she was wishing, oh, how earnestly, that Leolin's better nature would return to him; and that he would leave the young lord at peace.

"Aunt Anna, we have come to see the baby," interrupted Mary Pomeroy, running into the room, as Anna sat down again. "Rupert did not want to come, and I made him. He is afraid of Uncle Leolin, you know; but we saw him ride off towards Owlstone."

"You must not be afraid of Uncle Leolin," said Anna, smiling to assure the lad, and taking his hand to encourage him. What a gentle refined boy it was, she could not help thinking; what a slender, graceful form; what a *good* face, with its beautiful features, and its now healthy, transparent complexion. "Uncle Leolin will not harm you."

"He would like to, though," interposed Mary, who was bold as Rupert was reticent. "Uncle Leolin hates him because he is Lord of Pomeroy. He would like to beat him."

"Hush, Mary," said Lady Anna. "See, you are waking baby. You talk too much."

Rupert bent over the child: a fair little thing, resembling its mother, with her candid and expressive blue eyes.

"How pretty it is!" said Rupert. "May I kiss her?"

"Yes, of course you may," said Anna.

"What is her name going to be?" asked Mary.

"I am not sure. I should like it to be Isabel: but your uncle Leolin wants it to be Anna."

They were interrupted by the entrance of Leolin's groom of the chambers. The Lady of Pomeroy was below, he announced, inquiring whether she might then pay a visit to the Lady Anna.

Of course Anna assented, gladly. An eager glance of welcome sat in her eyes as she rose to greet Sybilla. The Lady of Pomeroy, looking the regal woman that she was, in her rich trailing black silk, met the welcoming glance, and the hand-clasp, with as fond a look, as firm a pressure.

They were very happy that afternoon. Sybilla, Anna, the two children, and the quiet baby. The latter so quiet that Sybilla mentally wondered whether it could be well. Anna ordered tea and they partook of it together. How thankful Anna would be to live ever in this familiar intercourse, and how warmly Sybilla would have reciprocated it, each was conscious of in her own heart.

"Thank you for this pleasant visit," Anna whispered, clasping the Lady of Pomeroy's hand when they were about to part. "You and your dear little son so rarely come into the north wing."

"It is so rarely that I may venture to come," whispered Sybilla.

Anna understood, and a painful blush suffused her face. "It will come right in time; I am sure of it," she eagerly rejoined. "It was a great disappointment to him, you know."

"I do know it," replied Sybilla. "And therefore I make every excuse for him. Yes, it will come right in time."

"What glorious news!" almost shouted Leolin.

He sat at the breakfast-table, reading a letter just delivered. It was the morning following his ride to Owlstone, a ride that had not borne fruit, for the post-office had held no letters for the abbey. The letter, that he was now hastily scanning, was from his friend the cardinal.

"What glorious news!" repeated Leolin, rising to seek his wife, letter in hand. For Anna was scarcely strong enough yet to breakfast with him.

"Such news, Anna!" was his triumphant greeting, when he found her. "Here's a letter from my good friend the cardinal. The Papal Court has decided to pronounce the marriage null and void."

Anna, wrapped in a white morning-gown, was bending over the infant's crib in the night-nursery. She turned her face towards him. Its expression of sadness somewhat checked Leolin's high spirits.

"Come and look at baby, Leolin. Nurse does not think she is well. See how quiet she lies, her eyes half open."

"Teeth, perhaps," suggested Leolin, not in the least knowing whether an infant of three weeks ought to cut teeth or not. "Send for Norris, if you don't think her well. But is this not good news, Anna?"

He went back to his breakfast, and to indulge in all kinds of delightful anticipations of what he would do when he was once more Lord of Pomeroy, the child's indisposition passing quite out of his mind.

But ere mid-day struck out from the great clock in the quadrangle, there was commotion in the abbey. The infant was in convulsions. Mr. Norris gave faint hopes of its life. Father Andrew was summoned in haste, and baptized it in the name of Isabel.

A few hours more of life: and, as the dusk of evening was passing into darkness, the young and feeble spirit quitted its earthly tenement and returned to Him who gave it.

Anna's grief was great. Leolin mourned the child, but not as his wife did: which perhaps was only natural. Condolences came in to Lady Anna from the other parts of the abbey: the lady's were expressed in a feeling and affectionate letter; Mrs. Pomeroy more formally sent her card with a few words written on it.

But, on the day after the death, when Leolin had gone round to the chapel with Father Andrew to see about the place of interment, Rupert stole to the front-entrance, Leolin's entrance, rang gently, and asked whether he might see Lady Anna. He had a white flower in his hand.

"I don't think my lady will see you now, sir," said Cox, who had met the boy at the door. "She is in great grief, you know."

"Yes, I know; but if I *might* see her?" urged Rupert. "Would you mind just asking her, Cox?"

Leaving Rupert where he was, Cox had the message taken to Lady Anna. And Anna said he was to be admitted.

The tears stood in her eyes as he went in. "Anna kissed him in silence."

"I wanted to tell you how sorry I am," began Rupert. "But please don't cry too much: mamma says she is gone up to heaven."

"Oh yes, I know," answered Anna, bursting into tears forthwith. "If it had only pleased God to spare her to us a little while!"

"And I have brought this for her," added Rupert, timidly offering the flower. "Would you mind putting it in her hand? It is quite white: and mamma says she is in white now, with the angels."

Anna took the flower almost with reverence. Clasp- ing the gentle child to her, she wept upon his neck. And she thought what a beautiful nature had this little Rupert Pomeroy.

CHAPTER IX.

LATER ON.

THE lichen-covered walls of Pomeroy Abbey stood out, gloomy and grand, under the bright rays of the October noon, now riding in the cloudless sky and nearing the full. A stormy day had given place to a calm evening. The pine forest rose, dark and sombre, on yonder hill; the distant sea gleamed and sparkled in the moonlight.

Listlessly pacing about between the keep and the front of the abbey, enjoying his after-dinner cigar, was Leolin Pomeroy. But, though his walk might be listless, his mind was almost preternaturally occupied. Above him were the windows of the south wing: some of them lighted up, others dark and shadowy. By the frown upon Leolin's face as he glanced up at them, one might gather that his thoughts were not agreeable ones.

Time has elapsed since the events recorded in the last chapter: but Pomeroy Abbey and those connected with it stand very much now as they stood then.

It may be remembered that Leolin was in high glee at the favourable news received from Rome. But the news turned out to be premature. Whether the cardinal, in his zeal for

the cause, had been over sanguine, or whether his eminence was himself deceived, it matters not to inquire; all Leolin knew was, that the decree had not been pronounced. The cardinal was as much Leolin's friend as ever, but he could not obtain the decree of annulment. It was not yet pronounced: and the marriage of George Pomeroy still held good in law.

Only the greater reason, argued Leolin, for redoubling his efforts. The cause seemed to him to grow more righteous day by day, his own wrongs more glaring. During this interlude a second girl was born to him, but it had died as had the first. There was now another infant, a few months old; a son, who had been named Hugh after the old lord. Since his birth, Lady Anna had been suffering from low fever; but she was growing stronger now. In Leolin's own heart he regarded this little son as the heir of Pomeroy; and he hated the young lad, Rupert, more than ever, for usurping what ought to be his.

But this was not the trouble exercising Leolin's mind to-night. The immediate perplexity, filling his thoughts and darkening his brow, was one that many of us have, more or less, suffered from: want of money. A secret suit cannot be carried on for nothing. Leolin's income was a small one, as the reader knows. Very small indeed for a man in his position; though he had the free use of the abbey and its servants. Lord Essington continued his allowance to him; besides slipping, now and again, a ten or twenty-pound note into his daughter's hand, whenever they were sojourning together; but it all seemed as a drop in the ocean, with Leolin's ways and means for throwing it away on this unlucky and unjust suit. No wonder he had grown embarrassed.

This embarrassment was the matter lying on his heart to-night, bringing wrath in its train. To think that she, inhabiting that south wing above him, the Lady of Pomeroy, should possess so much, and he so little! The income offered to him by Sybilla he persisted in declining haughtily and ungraciously; nevertheless he coveted the means that were hers. And what on earth she did with her money, he could not imagine.

The latter question had long puzzled him. That Sybilla lived in less state than the reigning widow of any Lord of Pomeroy had lived yet, was evident to the world. Scarcely a tithe, certainly not a fourth, had she spent of her revenues; or, strictly speaking, of her son's revenues; but George Pomeroy had left her in sole control of them. • The superfluous yearly thousands, what became of them?

The knowledge came to him incidentally, through a banker with whom Leolin was conversing one day when he was up in town. The Lady of Pomeroy was putting by large sums yearly; not in her own name, or in that of her son, but in the name of one Thomas Barkley. •

It took Leolin not very long to decide that this Thomas Barkley must be the Major Barkley who had been George's great friend in India. His name was Thomas. Major Barkley had retired from service after George's death: had since spent some of his time in foreign travel: twice he had travelled down to Pomeroy on a visit to Sybilla and her little son. During these visits Leolin had condescended to accept the lady's occasional invitations to meet him at her table, and he had been certainly impressed in Major Barkley's favour, for he appeared to possess good sense and to be a man of rectitude and a thorough gentleman. But why should this man be enriched by the Pomeroy revenues? What did it mean? Pacing about under the abbey walls, with the fair moon shining full upon him, and the murmur of the sea sounding faintly in his ears in the silence of the night, Leolin Pomeroy was weaving to himself a pretty little nightmare of romantic doubt.

"She must be in Barkley's power--deceitful woman! that seems certain," spoke he to himself, thus politely alluding to Sybilla. "I wonder if her agent, Knox, knows anything of this? I've a great mind to ask him. What a shame it is that I should be in such need of money, while she is lavishing----- Ah! good-evening to you, father!"

"Is it you, or your ghost?" cried Father Andrew, merry as usual, and stouter and redder than of yore. Coming from the direction of the chapel with a fleet step, he had overtaken Leolin. "I thought you were in London."

"I returned home an hour ago," said Leolin, throwing away the end of his cigar.

"I have been into the chapel; seeing that the black draperies were up, and all things in readiness for to-morrow," remarked the priest. And the words brought to Leolin's mind what perhaps he had momentarily forgotten—that the morrow would be a solemn day with the Pomeroy; the anniversary of the death of Guy.

"A nice night," remarked Leolin.

"At present. But I don't like those clouds over the forest: they mean stormy weather of some kind. I am going on to Lamp's," added the priest; "his mother's worse. How do you find Lady Anna looking?"

"Bravely. She tells me she walked out to-day."

They strolled side by side to the front of the abbey, talking, when the priest continued his way and Leolin stood still to light another cigar. Puffing away at it, he resumed the train of thought which Father Andrew had interrupted.

"I shall speak to Knox. Don't know that it will be of any use: he never shows himself too communicative on his mistress's affairs—by her orders, I suppose. And if— Why, who's this? Knox himself? What does he want here at this hour?"

James Knox was approaching the abbey gateway with a quick step. He soon disappeared within it. Leolin followed him to the business room, and found him rummaging amidst some papers on his large desk by the light of a solitary candle.

"You work late," was Leolin's greeting.

James Knox laughed. He was a pleasant man, and a gentleman by birth, though he had become the agent, or steward, to the Lady of Pomeroy. A little dark man with bright dark eyes. In early days he and the young Pomeroy had played together.

"I am not at work," he answered. "I took home in my pocket, as I thought, a list of accounts that I meant to go over leisurely to-night; but when I arrived there I could not find it. One does not like to lose things, Mr. Leolin, and I have come to look for it."

Leolin sat down near the desk. In the same seat where the reader once saw him sitting whilst talking to John Gaunt, when Leolin, poor fellow, thought himself Lord of Pomeroy. Knox was turning over papers and pigeon-holes with a rapid hand.

"Now what can I have done with that list?" cried he. "It is not here. Hope no light fingers filched it out of my pocket, going home in the twilight."

"Is it anything of consequence?"

"Well, no. But I shall have the trouble of making out another. It was a list of the rents and moneys paid in this last year."

"Talking of rents, the revenues of this estate must be improving, I fancy," carelessly observed Leolin.

"They are. But it righted itself in your brother George's time. Gaunt did wonders for it."

"Ay: he knew who he was working for," was Leolin's reply, given in anything but gracious tones. "But now, with all these large revenues coming in—and they are large—what does my brother George's widow do with them?"

James Knox turned his eyes, honest eyes they were, full upon Leolin. "I don't know," he answered; "she does not tell me. She does not spend them."

"She does not spend a tithe of them, you mean," retorted Leolin. "But you must know how she employs them, Knox—in your position as steward."

"I assure you I do not know. The moneys are paid in by me to the Owlstone Bank, and that's all I have to do with them. The Lady of Pomeroy no doubt transmits them to Mr. Hildyard."

"For investment?"

"Naturally. She would not keep them lying idle."

"Well, then, Knox, I can tell you that *nothing* is transmitted to Mr. Hildyard. Hildyard is as much in the dark as I am. He was good enough for my father, and for my brothers, poor Guy and George; but it seems he is not so for the lady at present reigning here. Some one else must act for her in regard to money matters & Hildyard does not do so."

Mr. Knox shook his head. This was no concern of his; he did not want to make it his, or to speak of it. He began searching for his lost list again.

"Has that Barkley anything to do with business matters here?" resumed Leolin.

"Barkley? What Barkley?"

"Major Barkley—formerly my brother George's friend. You must remember him, Knox."

"Oh yes—I remember now—Major Barkley: he has stayed at the abbey once or twice. Certainly he has not anything to do with our business here. Why should he have—and how? He is abroad."

Leolin did not choose to say what he had heard. Knox, giving up his list as hopeless, prepared to lock up the desk.

"You are *sure* he has not?" persisted Leolin.

"Has not what?"

"Anything to do with the Pomeroy hoards?"

"Certainly not. So far as I know and believe."

"He was left executor, you know, to George's will," added Leolin, as if seeking to account for his questions.

"But his business, in connection with that, was over and done with long ago," was the agent's answer: and he took his departure.

Standing in the gateway to finish his cigar, Leolin saw a chariot approaching. Jeffs was on the box, by which Leolin knew the carriage must be that of the Lady of Pomeroy, and no doubt contained his sister Joan, who had been staying at the convent on a visit to the Lady Abbess. She was now coming for the morrow's services and to remain the guest of Sybilla.

Leolin waited to receive his sister. And then, their greeting over, he turned away to his solitary walk again. The perplexity, touching Major Thomas Barkley, running riot in his brain.

Autumn had been genial that year: the sun bright, the air warm up to the middle of October. But to-day wintry weather had come in. The skies were gloomy; the wind rose in mournful strains, now rushing along in terrific

gusts, and now gently shaking the trees with a sound of lamentation. Thus it had been since early morning.

Twilight was drawing on apace. In one of the rooms of the south tower sat the Lady of Pomeroy and her sister-in-law, Joan, both habited in the deepest mourning, their custom on this particular day. This apartment, one of elegance and refinement, but small, looked out on the courtyard.

"How the wind howls!" exclaimed Miss Pomeroy, shivering as the blast seemed to shake the tower. "Sybilla, I wonder you prefer this tower sitting-room on these windy nights."

"It is more cheerful, Joan. The drawing-rooms in the wing are large and dreary, for they look out upon the forest over the hill, with its dark trees bowing down. I think trees are the most melancholy objects possible when the wind has this peculiar sound. In this room we look out upon the court, with its lights and signs of life."

"I have observed that on this day the wind always does come up in these blasts," returned Joan, in whispers that seemed to shrink from their own echo. "It is as if the dead were abroad."

"What now, Joan? What do you mean by 'this day'?" quickly asked the Lady of Pomeroy.

"It is the seventeenth of October," replied Miss Pomeroy, as she crossed herself.

"Do I not know it? Have we not attended the services in the chapel? kept it as the most solemn we can ever know? But, Joan, do not speak of the dead being abroad: you should shake off the Pomeroy superstition."

"It is now nine years since the fatal night; four of its anniversaries I have passed in the abbey, and each time it has been one of these howling, gloomy days. They are enough to call up feelings of superstition, in themselves alone."

"Not so, Joan: save to a mind too prone to indulge in it. But you seemed to connect your idea of the 'dead being abroad' with this particular day."

"As I do," answered Joan.

That that day nine years ago had been a memorable one for the Pomeroy's none can deny. In that room of the west tower, exactly opposite to the one they now sat in, a room shunned for long, long years before as being the haunt of a departed spirit, wronged in life, Guy met his dreadful death by Rupert's hand—and Rupert had ever since been an exile.

Mrs. Pomeroy rose, with a quick movement, almost as though her thoughts were too much for her, and drew aside the window-curtain. There she stood, looking down on the quadrangle. The rooms in the north wing, inhabited by Leolin's household, were gay with many lights: and it may be that Joan felt cheered by the silent companionship. Light fleecy clouds scudded along the otherwise clear sky; the moonlight shone full on the west wing and tower.

"It has turned out a bright night," she observed, returning to the table and taking up her work; "I never saw a brighter. By the way, I don't think I gave you Sister Mildred's message, Sybilla. She asked me to tell you that the poor little orphan-girl, whom you have placed in the convent, is a sweet child, clever, and will do credit to the sisters."

"I am glad of that; I thought she would. But—about Sister Mildred herself? Does it strike you, Joan, that she is getting to look old? She has seemed to me to be very poorly of late."

"She has been so worried, you see, by that business connected with the Hildyards. Indeed, it has worried the whole community. As the ladies say, it has brought them all into disrepute."

"I do not see that," dissented Sybilla. "They were not to blame; neither is blame attached to them. It was a grievous thing."

"It was a shameful thing," amended Joan. "Nothing like it had ever occurred in the convent before. It is killing Mr. Hildyard."

"It must have been a terrible blow to him. When did you see him last?"

"Shortly before I came down here. Henry Capel had

to consult him when we were in London, and I went with him to Lincoln's Inn. You cannot think how he is changed, poor man; worn, and grey, and sad; heart and spirit seem to be alike broken. I fear he is not long for this world."

"Oh, I can feel for him," earnestly spoke Sybilla. "There is no trouble tells home like that brought by a rebellious child. I trust he will rally; matters, in regard to Frances, may not be so dark as they appear on the surface."

"I can't see much hope of that. There is just a chance, of course. I asked him," continued Joan, lowering her voice, "whether anything had been since heard or seen of Rupert."

Lost in other thoughts, Sybilla looked up in surprise. "Oh yes,"—catching Joan's meaning—"since the clerk, Collins, saw him on board the Spanish ship. What did Mr. Hildyard say?" she added after a pause.

"That nothing, so far as he knows, has been seen or heard of Rupert since then. I hope and pray it will not be. That is a long time ago. If we could only hear that he was dead!"

"Don't, Joan."

"I know it seems a fearful thing to say of a brother," wailed Joan. "But I speak for his own sake, as well as for ours, Sybilla; for what a bitter fate his must be—what a life of dread! Poor misguided Rupert!"

CHAPTER X.

MYSTERY. •

On this same evening, Alice, widow of Guy Pomeroy, sat in her dressing-room, its windows facing the west wing and tower. This anniversary, coming round year after year, could not be pleasant for her. Pleasant? say, rather, most

miserable. She had attended, with the rest of the abbey, the services in the chapel: at the conclusion of vespers she had shut herself in her rooms, closing them against intruders.

On the anniversary of the death of any one of the Lords of Pomeroy, it was customary to celebrate a mass year after year in the chapel, for the repose of his soul. But the death of Guy had been terrible; and he had passed away unshriven; so that his anniversary, the seventeenth of October, was made doubly solemn in its religious observances, and kept as a strict fast until sunset. Now that the services were over, Mrs. Pomeroy sat in her solitary room, her hands listlessly clasped upon her black dress, remembrance her sole companion.

Her eyes fixed on the windows of the haunted room, the terrible room which had been so fatal to her, there she sat, and indulged her reflections. What could those reflections be? We cannot penetrate them; cannot well realize the remorse that must have been her portion. For it was she who had brought about the terrible calamity; she, and she alone. What though no absolute guilt stained her memory, there remained her folly, her sinful folly: and, be very sure, of that folly she had long ago repented with bitter sighs and tears. Through her and her folly Guy had died, and Rupert was an exile. But she had never condoned the fact that Guy won her by a lie; and her feeling towards him was still one of dislike, rather than of love.

The mental distress in which she lived had been recently added to by her becoming acquainted with that hazardous visit of Rupert's to England in the Spanish barque: which fact had previously been kept from her. She learnt it through inadvertence. During Joan's late sojourn at the convent, she drove to Pomeroy one day unexpectedly, and found only Mrs. Pomeroy visible. Sybilla had gone with the two children to Owlstone, Lady Anna was lying down, Leolin was in London. Though not choosing to accept Mrs. Pomeroy's hospitality in a general way, Joan could not in courtesy refuse it now, and she partook of luncheon. During the meal, Mrs. Pomeroy, in her sad, subdued way,

spoke a few words concerning an unhappy wanderer, an acquaintance, who had been obliged to fly his country. Joan thought she referred to Rupert, and replied that he had not been heard of since that dangerous visit. The next moment Joan saw her error: she had forgotten that the matter had never been disclosed to Mrs. Pomeroy, and she dropped the subject abruptly. But the alarm and distress depicted on Alice's face were so great, her petition to be enlightened so pitiful, that Joan had no resource but to briefly disclose the facts; and she went away haughtily dissatisfied with herself for having been betrayed into alluding to it. It was the first time, all these nine years, that the name of Rupert had been breathed by her to Mrs. Pomeroy.

Since then, it was not a week ago, Alice Pomeroy had lived in the most intense dread. The affair had taken quite an exaggerated hold upon her mind. In every shadowy nook she saw the ill-fated Rupert, cowering and shivering and hiding himself from the law: and she saw, in imagination, the dread officers of that same law pouncing upon him.

Did he often venture into this dangerous kingdom?—was he in England now? From fearing that he might be, she grew to believing that he was: and an active terror stirred her.

All through these dreary years her heart had ached with its suppressed pain. Many a time she had longed, with a yearning, irrepressible longing, to behold Rupert once again—that she might tell him how she deplored the past, and the bitter consequences it had entailed upon him. If he suffered, she suffered. She had never—let it be repeated—forgiven the part acted towards herself and Rupert by Guy; she still felt it keenly and resentfully; she would picture to herself the miserable life of Rupert; suspense had racked her as to whether he was dead or living. This revelation of Miss Pomeroy's, although it referred to some three or four years back, seemed to prove to her that he yet lived—and that they might meet again.

The moon had risen high as Mrs. Pomeroy sat, and its

rays fell full on the haunted chamber: so had they fallen on the ever-to-be-remembered night, when she was within it with Rupert. She raised her hands to her still young and beautiful face, and, pressing its temples, spoke aloud in her abandonment of remembrance and sorrow.

"Will he dare to venture back again?—will he dare to come to Pomeroy? Oh, that he would, that I might warn him! I would ask but one brief interview with him, that I might tell him his visits to England were known and watched for—as I make no doubt they are; that treachery is abroad, and that he must hasten to put the seas between himself and his enemies. We might speak just one word of comfort to each other's worn and weary heart, to strengthen ourselves in bearing up on our lone and miserable way."

A half-moan, wrung from her distress, and Mrs. Pomeroy flung her hands over her eyes, as if she would shut out the sight of that fatal west tower. Presently her hands dropped on her gown, and she spoke again.

"He might have come back at first, and have assumed his rights. He ought to have assumed them at the time—have stayed to battle the affair out, instead of running away. I have always thought so. Had he possessed one proper friend to smooth the way for him, he might have stayed. He surely might. Let them talk as they will, punishment could not have fallen upon him. Though he might perhaps have had to stand his trial, he would never have been punished. It was no murder; it was a scuffle—am not I here to testify to it? Guy drew his pistol upon him, and then they closed with each other, and Rupert turned the pistol back in self-defence. I know it must have been so. He is the true lord; even Sybilla says it, though it would dispossess her son; and he ought to be reigning here. It is too late now for this; his very absence seems to the world to testify to his sense of guilt. No one is for him; even Joan condemns him; and the law would only take him if he ventured here. So there is no help for it; no end to the pain of his unhappy life. Oh, Rupert! if the past might only be re-lived! If I might only see you once again! If—"

Mrs. Pomeroy's voice died suddenly, but her mouth remained open in dread amazement. If ever she saw the figure of Rupert Pomeroy, she thought she saw it then, in the haunted room. In spite of the wild wish she had just expressed, she gazed in dismay, striving to peer beyond the panes of the window in the west tower on which the moonlight fell, striving to still her beating heart.

The longer she gazed, the more terrified she grew. That some one was moving about, within that room, was certain. It appeared to be a man's figure of remarkable height, as Rupert's was. Yes, surely it was Rupert! He came forward more than once, and she distinctly saw his head bent against the panes of the window: and, even as she looked, a light for one brief moment appeared in the room, so that she discerned the outlines of his form and face. A strange thrill ran through her: it was undoubtedly Rupert Pomeroy. But the light—what was that for? It appeared as though a match had been struck and as instantly extinguished.

Curious fancies come into a woman's mind, and into a man's also, sometimes. Mrs. Pomeroy arrived at the conclusion, by a process of reasoning which had little of reason in it, that Rupert had struck the flash of light to give token of his presence. The flash must have been as visible to other windows as to hers; wondering eyes might likewise be at them; and a terrible dread took possession of her.

What could he want—and in that place? she asked herself. Could he be aware that his liberty and life lay in peril in this his native land; and that an incautious word dropped by a servant might spread the news far and wide, and bring that peril down upon him? Oh, she must contrive to warn him of his danger; it seemed to be almost as a sacred duty laid upon her—for had it not been she who helped to bring the trouble upon him? It might be that, in Heaven's mercy, no one but herself had discerned the flash of light, or seen that any one was in the tower. Surely Heaven, looking down upon his misery all these long years, must, and would, be merciful to him now.

In the excitement that possessed her, she lost sight of the dread journey that would be hers, in going to the west tower. There might be no time to lose ; for in that room he surely would not linger ; but that he had contrived to get to it to make known his presence, and to signal some one from the abbey to him, she could not doubt.

Throwing a black lace shawl over her head to ward off recognition, Mrs. Pomeroy stole downstairs to the cloisters, as she had once stolen years before, and gained the north tower. But its door was locked. How then could Rupert have gained admittance to the west wing ? She drew into a corner to solve the mystery.

She could not do it. Gliding back, she entered a passage that took her to the window of the key-closet, in which a light burned. Peering in, she saw the bunch of keys belonging to the closed room hanging in its respective niche. What a mystery it all was—now, as then ! But she must gain admittance for Rupert's sake. Had he kept false keys by him all these years ?

Speeding back, she entered the day-nursery. Bridget was kneeling down in the dark, her face just above the sill of the window, and as close to its glass as Mrs. Pomeroy's had just been to that of the key-closet. She started up with a cry of surprise at the entrance of her mistress.

"Why are you in darkness ?" sharply demanded Mrs. Pomeroy. "What are you looking at ?"

Bridget made no reply. She opened the store cupboard to take out her candle and box of matches ; but before lighting it she turned to draw down the blind.

"I ask you, Bridget, what you were looking at, thus glued to the window ! Let the blind alone ; and tell me."

"I will tell you, madam, if you please, but I do not know whether it would be well to do so," replied Bridget, speaking readily, now that she had broken the silence.

"Are you to constitute yourself a judge of what may or may not be told to me ?" haughtily returned Mrs. Pomeroy. "Speak instantly."

Bridget drew away from the faint light that came in at the window ; the moon did not shine on these rooms

as it did on those opposite; and her voice dropped to a whisper.

"Madam, Mr. Rupert has come back at last."

Mrs. Pomeroy's heart fluttered. Her fears were confirmed.

"How do you know it, Bridget? Have you seen him?" she inquired, and her imperious tone had changed to one of dread.

"I have seen him every night for a week in the haunted room opposite," replied Bridget. "I saw him to-night, a quarter-of-an-hour ago, and I was watching for him again, madam, when you came in."

"You have seen him for a week past!" repeated Mrs. Pomeroy, in utter amazement.

"Just one week ago this night, madam, was the first time. It was a deal later than this, and a dark night. Miss Mary was restless; she had gone to bed in anger with mademoiselle, and she could not sleep, and called to me to go in and tell her some tales. Well, madam, I did so, and sat till she was asleep, and then I came back here. I stood a few minutes at the window before relighting my candle, which I had put out, and was watching the servants' lights in the north wing—there were plenty of them visible, for if you remember, madam, Mr. Leolin had a gentleman's dinner party that night: it was the night before he went to London. I was looking at them, when all in a moment I saw a flash of light in the haunted room; it went out again, but not before I had caught sight of some form that looked like Mr. Rupert's. I was struck with fright. I thought what will become of him if he lets himself be seen. I watched the best part of the night, but I saw no more, and I have watched every night since, and seen him in it: never for above a moment until last night. Last evening, madam, he stood for a good five minutes at the window in the moon-light."

"It must be madness," gasped Mrs. Pomeroy. "Have you mentioned this, Bridget?"

"No, madam, not to a single soul," replied the woman, warmly. "I know the danger of that too well."

"Is he much altered?" faintly asked Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Nay, madam, but how could I tell from this distance? One must get near to him to judge of that."

"Bridget"—and Mrs. Pomeroy's voice trembled with its emotion—"are you sure you are not mistaken? Is it veritably Mr. Rupert?"

"Was there ever a tall, noble form like his, madam—save the lord's, and he has been under the sod these nine years? No, madam, I cannot mistake the form or the turn of the head of Mr. Rupert Pomeroy."

"I thought I saw him myself this evening," whispered Mrs. Pomeroy. "You are *sure* you have not told of this?" she added, remembering the girl's inveterate propensity for gossip.

"Surely not," answered Bridget: "it is not I that would bring trouble upon a Pomeroy. But I wish he could be warned of the hazard he runs: others may see him, and might haste to spread the news abroad. I misdoubt me that he must have taken up his abode in those rooms for safety. But how can he get his food?"

Mrs. Pomeroy leaned against the window-frame, and thought. Her project of penetrating to the west tower was growing more feasible.

"Bridget," she said, arousing herself with a start, "we cannot let Mr. Rupert stay there unwarned. You must go into the north wing and get me the keys. I will go up myself."

Bridget could scarcely answer in her surprise. "*I* get the keys, madam! Cox would never trust me with the keys!"

"You can take them without his knowledge. Use your cunning. The keys are hanging there, for I have just seen them. Go at once: every moment increases Mr. Rupert's peril, and he must be warned away. I will await you in the cloisters."

Mrs. Pomeroy waited, as it seemed to her, an interminable time. Bridget came at last, and began boasting of the stratagem by which she had obtained possession of the keys; but Mrs. Pomeroy cut the tale short, and desired her to go indoors.

"Madam—shall you like to go up alone?" whispered the woman.

"I will do it, whether I like it or not," was the valiant reply of Mrs. Pomeroy. "Were two persons to go up, their movements might attract attention. Go back to the nursery. Bridget, and be silent as the grave."

Her heart beating strangely, Mrs. Pomeroy went up the stairs of the north tower, and into the rooms of the west wing, unlocking each door as she came to it. The windows of all these rooms, as may be remembered, faced the courtyard, and the moonlight streamed in, affording her sufficient light to read the labels on the keys. Trembling and sick, not only at the thought of meeting Rupert, but with the dread of passing through these dismal rooms alone, about which such ghostly tales were told, she swept swiftly on and gained the haunted room in the west tower, the wind shrieking ominously in her ears. She marvelled at her own courage: but that so much was at stake, and that she was hastening to his sheltering presence, he so strong, so able in that sense, to protect, she could never have dared it.

Did she remember in that moment how she had last stolen into that room, nine years ago? Did she remember her second visit to it on that same fatal night? How she had crept in with steps of dread to discover the effects of the fearful scuffle from which she had flown, and fallen over her husband, dead upon the ground? And now she was creeping into it again, to find—what? Nothing pleasant, she might be sure. Though this time she was at least actuated by a sense of duty.

Pushing aside the hangings of the haunted room, she stepped into it, expecting to see Rupert. But the room was empty. The bright moonlight, shining in, very bright indeed that night, enabled her to see every part of it. The room looked just as it had looked that former night; nothing seemed to have been touched, nothing changed. The old red velvet furniture was there, the nun's picture, with the burn partly defacing it, hung in its place behind the velvet curtain.

But where was Rupert? What was this mystery? The

rooms all locked, and this one empty! She began to shiver.

"Rupert!" she called out, faintly at first, but desperation gave her courage, and her frightened voice echoed through the silent rooms. "Rupert, Rupert!"

It echoed with a weird, ghostly sound, blending with the wind that howled and laboured without. Mrs. Pomeroy sat down on the broad old velvet settle: her superstitious fancies, suppressed in the moment of need, were coming back to her. What if the nun's ghost—so often seen in that room in years gone by, if people were to be believed—should appear to her? What if—if—the ghost of her murdered husband should appear to her? She gave a smothered shriek at the supposition, and hid her face in her hands and bent it down on her knees.

What had become of Rupert she knew not; but for his sake, that she might speak to him just one word of warning, she stayed on, hoping he would return. She strove to put away the superstitious dread that was attacking her; she strove to think the wind did not moan like a troubled spirit; she strove to forget the tales which had been prevalent after the murder, that Guy "came again." Did you ever so strive, faint-hearted reader? But possibly you never were in a haunted room at dead of night, far removed from human ear. If you have undergone the ordeal, did you succeed in reassuring yourself to calmness?—or did not, rather, the awful, unearthly dread, the feeling, which can neither be experienced nor told of in the broad daylight, in human companionship, did it not increase until— But let it pass: you do not like to be reminded of these cowardly moments, though you would not live them over again to have years added to your life. What then must it have been for Alice Pomeroy, with her unhappy remembrance and her burdened conscience?

She strove. She battled with the haunted atmosphere with the moaning wind, with the consciousness that that evening was the ominous anniversary of Guy's death: she stirred neither hand nor foot, she scarcely dared to breathe, she could not have looked up for the wealth of worlds.

Just as a timid child hides its face in the dark, and dares not raise it, lest its eyes should encounter some fabulous monster, so was it with Mrs. Pomeroy. She began to ask herself how she could get back again, how escape from the haunted tower, through the rooms and down the stairs. Should she ever dare to go? Must she sit where she was until the dawn?

Some talking below in the court-yard gave her a gleam of fresh courage, and she glanced up again. She *must* make an effort to get away; but not until she had once more tried to apprise Rupert that she was there.

"Rupert, where are you?" she called out with desperate effort. "Oh! Rupert, why don't you come to me? Only for one moment! I have ventured here for your sake."

Hark! What was that? A sigh?—a groan?—it sounded like it. But where did it come from? It was not the wind; it was a totally different sound. It seemed to be in the walls—or was it only in her own imagination? A more lively terror than before fell upon Mrs. Pomeroy, and once more she hid her face. How long it was before she looked up again, she knew not; for ghostly terrors had full hold of her now. She would have forfeited half her remaining life to be back in her home again.

Well had it been for her peace of mind that she never had looked up: for there, against the nun's picture, standing as he had stood that night, not many minutes before his death, when he had burst in upon their wretched and foolish interview, that in truth had been partly passed in abusing him, there was his apparition—that of her husband, Guy. The moonlight shone upon his ghastly face, upon his hare-lip, red once, but livid now; and his dull eyes were bent upon her in mingled sadness and anger, just as she had seen them bent in life. He seemed to be dressed as he was dressed the night of his death, in a plain suit of black, and the one arm was raised, as if in anger at the loving words which had escaped her; raised just in the menacing way that the nun's arm was in the picture.

How Mrs. Pomeroy left the couch and reached the window, she never afterwards remembered: some instinct

prompted her there. She moved sideways: *she could not turn her eyes from that awful figure*, standing there with its face of reproach; it was fascinating her like the gaze of the basilisk. But now it seemed to be changing its position, to be gliding towards her; and, with a low, suffocating sob, that sounded like no human voice, Mrs. Pomeroy turned to the window, dashed both her hands through it, shrieked out for succour in her terrible agony and fell senseless to the ground.

The crash of glass was heard, and the shriek for aid; the hands, wringing wildly, were seen. Bridget, possessing sufficient curiosity for any ten women, had returned to her room, and opening the window, thrust her head out to see anything there might be to be seen opposite. To do her justice, she had also a better motive—her mistress might be seized with fright up there, and signal for her. So Bridget's eyes watched the west tower keenly as a cat watches a mouse, and Bridget was at length rewarded by seeing and hearing more than she had bargained for—the hands flung out, and the cry for help, as from some poor creature in its last agony.

Bridget was thunderstruck. Were the hands and the cry Mrs. Pomeroy's? Bred up in the Pomeroy superstitions, Bridget came to the conclusion that Mrs. Pomeroy must have seen the ghost; meaning, of course, that of the nun. In her astonishment and fear, Bridget stood where she was, giving no alarm, hastening with no aid, simply staring at the ominous window. As she gazed, a figure seemed to grow in it; the same towering figure which she had attributed to Rupert; but now its face was brought close and full to the panes, and Bridget recognized it in the bright moonlight—the ghastly face of the dead Lord of Pomeroy. With a smothered howl, not unlike the cry which had escaped from Mrs. Pomeroy, Bridget turned from the room and tore away in her fright; she cared not much whither, so that she reached human companionship. She flew out to the great gateway of the abbey, and, crossing it, entered the noble hall, belonging to the part occupied by Teolin. A servant confronted her.

"Are you out of your mind, Bridget?" he asked, noting her wild looks.

Ignoring ceremony, waiting for nothing, Bridget went on to the state apartments. In one of them sat Leolin and Father Andrew, playing at chess. She made a hasty reverence to the priest, who, as confessor to the household, periodically became the depositary of Bridget's peccadilloes; but her wits were too utterly scared away to allow of much reverence just now.

"May all the saints have mercy upon Pomeroy!" uttered she, very nearly crazed with terror, grasping the back of a chair to steady herself. "The lord's come again."

"What do you mean?" demanded Leolin, amazed at her extraordinary proceedings. "What lord is come again?"

"Oh, sir, forgive me, but I'm just terrified to death. Your poor brother, sir, is in the west tower."

Leolin thought she meant Rupert, and uttered the name involuntarily, as he rose from his seat in consternation little less than hers. Father Andrew took a pinch of snuff while he stared at her.

"Ah, no, sir; not Mr. Rupert. Not but what at first I thought it was he; but it's the poor dead lord, Guy. Ah, you'll believe me now, sir. I told it, years ago, that the lord's ghost appeared to me the very night of his burying, and I was bade hold my nonsense. I told you, father, and you only mocked at me—craving your pardon—and made fun of my eyesight. You may both believe me now."

"What are you saying?" repeated Leolin, his fears relieved on the score of Rupert, but unable to comprehend a syllable, and wondering whether Bridget was suddenly attacked with insanity.

"There's the dead Lord of Pomeroy in the haunted room at this blessed moment, sir," she whispered: "I have seen him with my own eyes. It is said a troubled soul always comes out of purgatory on the anniversary of its doom, though it be for ages and ages after; and it is nine years ago to-night; you know it, sir."

Leolin Pomeroy, man of the world though he was, had been reared in superstition, and he rose from his seat in

some discomfort. The father, on the contrary, looked very much inclined to laugh: perhaps he felt at home with ghosts and dead people.

"You must be out of your mind," spoke Leolin, haughtily, to the trembling Bridget.

"Ah, no, sir. I have seen some one in the haunted room this week past, and I thought only that it was Mr. Rupert come home from his wanderings. I thought he might be hiding there. Of course it was too far off, and the light too dim for me to see the features, and I took it to be Mr. Rupert. To-night, my mistress, sitting alone in her room, saw it too; she, like me, feared it was Mr. Rupert. She said he ought to be warned of the risk he ran, and she would go up and do it; she was full of apprehension for him, poor lady, just as I was. I got the keys for her, dodging Cox, who was near his key-closet at first; and she went up there, and——"

"Mrs. Pomeroy!—gone up to the west wing!" interrupted Leolin.

"Into the west tower, sir. She would go alone, fearing that two of us might be seen. I stood at my nursery and watched. Suddenly I saw two hands thrust through the glass of the casement, and I heard a shriek of terror. Before I had recovered enough to move, or do anything, the same tall figure rose close to the window in the moon-light. Ah, sir, it was not Mr. Rupert—Father Andrew, don't look so at me!—it was the spirit of the Lord of Pomeroy."

Father Andrew rapped his snuff-box. "You have good eyesight, Bridget, woman, to know a dead man's features all that way."

Bridget, between anger, fear, and excitement, broke into tears. "The moon shone full upon its face: don't you see, father, the night is almost as bright as day. Look at that curtainless window; you might see to read small print at it."

"There's not a soul throughout the abbey, of you old retainers, but will let your superstitious nonsense get the upper hand of your discretion on the seventeenth of October.

What should bring his spirit back again after all the masses said for its repose?"

"May I never be shriven when I am dying, if I did not see it to-night!" burst forth Bridget, in her haste and distress. "The peculiar lip was as plain to be seen as it ever was in life. And—you can't mistake a dead face, father. I am not the only one who has seen the lord since he died."

Leolin did not check her, as he certainly would at any other time. He was in a reverie: scared, if the truth must be told, just as much as was Bridget. Not, though, with ghostly fancies. How greatly he had all along hated these rumours of his brother's "coming again" he alone knew. Perhaps he could not have analyzed the feeling prompting this aversion, for he certainly put no faith in the tales. No; what was stirring Leolin now, scaring him out of his presence of mind, was a very tangible and real fear—he believed that it must be *Rupert* who was in the west tower.

At this juncture, the room-door softly opened; and Lady Anna Pomeroy came timidly in, her infant in her arms. *She* looked frightened; partaking, it seemed, of the general discomfort. Her face was pale; her eyes, wandering around, rested on Bridget, in surprise at seeing her there. His wife's entrance served to break Leolin's unpleasant thoughts.

"What is it, Anna?"

"There's something in the haunted room," she began in a whisper: for Lady Anna, having her abode amidst these superstitious people, had not escaped infection herself; and, to call it the "haunted room," had become, to her, quite natural. "I happened to be alone with baby, and was standing with him at the window, when I heard the crash of glass opposite, and I saw what looked like two hands thrust out at the casement of the west tower. I was not alarmed: I only wondered who it was that could have had the courage to go there at night, and this night of all others. In another minute I saw the outlines of some one inside, but I could not distinguish much, and then the room was lighted up with a pale flame, and a tall figure rose before the window. It looked—it looked like some one dead," she shivered.

"Anna!" reproachfully uttered Leolin.

"The face looked too white to be living," she resumed. "The pale flame, flashing out for a moment or two, lighted it up distinctly."

"That clear flame used to light up the room when the nun appeared," exclaimed Bridget. "I saw it myself, once, my lady."

Leolin Pomeroy frowned angrily upon her, and made a gesture for silence. He drew his wife to his side to re-assure her, keeping his hand upon her waist. "It must have been one of the servants, Anna."

"It was not one of the servants. I saw the face distinctly: it was like no one I ever knew; there seemed something strange about its lip," Anna added, sinking her voice. "It was a white, death-like face: I say that I do not think it belonged to any one living."

"No, my lady, that it did not," cried the undaunted Bridget. "But oh, sir, should not Mrs. Pomeroy be seen after?" she added to Leolin. "We are losing time, and she may just be dying of terror."

"But—Mrs. Pomeroy is surely not there now?" cried Leolin; whose own perplexity had partly obscured his understanding.

"Oh, sir, yes; that's why I presumed to come to you; I did not choose to speak of this to the servants. It was she who shrieked; it was her hands that were flung out."

Of course Mrs. Pomeroy must be seen after at once. But, full of fears for his misguided brother Rupert, Leolin hesitated yet an instant. It would never do to betray his presence there.

"Will you go up with me, father?" he said in low tones to the priest. "We had better go alone."

Father Andrew nodded a cheerful assent. Ghosts had no terrors for him. He was by far too fat and jolly: and the other fear, touching Rupert, had not rested with him. He believed that the whole thing had its rise in imaginings only, and that Mrs. Pomeroy must have become scared by the loneliness, when she found herself in the ill-omened room.

Carrying a light, he and Leolin proceeded alone to the haunted room, and were unmolested by sight or sound. Mrs. Pomeroy was lying, as she had fallen, beneath the window, in a dead faint. Raising her between them, they laid her on the old velvet couch; and the movement served to bring her to her senses. She seized them both as they stood over her; her wounded hands clasping theirs as though she would never release them again.

"Don't leave me, for the love of Heaven!"

"No, no," said Leolin, speaking softly in his compassion. "Have you been ill? What has alarmed you?"

"Is it gone?" she shuddered, glancing round. "In that spot—there," she continued faintly, pointing to the nun's picture, but not daring to raise her eyes to it, "stood the apparition of my husband. I would rather die than see it again; than be in this room with it alone."

"Daughter, your fears must have deceived you."

"Father Andrew, do you think I have forgotten him? Can I forget his features—his peculiar lip? He was little altered; his eyes were dull, and his face wore the hue of the grave."

"Did you truly see the hare-lip?" doubtingly spoke Leolin. "I think that must have been fancy."

"I saw it as truly and perfectly as ever I saw it in life. There were whispers at the time," she shuddered, "that he came again. There have been whispers since."

"It's a rare night for ghosts," cried the father, in his good-natured mockery, for he deemed it best not to treat it seriously. "The wind whirls round the abbey as if it owed it a grudge."

Leolin held the light so that its rays fell on every part of the small room. There was no possibility of any one being concealed in it; neither was there a sign that any one had been in it, save Mrs. Pomeroy and her imagination. He flashed it under the couch; he drew aside the old velvet curtain that was before the picture, and the lovely features of the ill-fated nun stood out to view, with her upturned finger, and the lines of the dark prophecy. Leolin had wondered why Guy, during his lifetime, did not destroy that

picture; he had wondered still more that Mrs. Pomeroy did not destroy it, with its miserable associations, when she reigned at the abbey after her husband's death: he was not aware that his brother George had chosen to let the west tower alone, and that his orders on that point were peremptory. Leolin himself had intended to consign the picture to the flames when he came into power, to put the west wing in habitable order, and do away with the superstition if possible; he had planned many other innovations and improvements, to be effected as soon as he should be residing at the abbey. Alas, at the very outset of his arrival, he was dispossessed. And it had pleased Sykilla to leave things as they were.

Leolin let the curtain fall into its place again over the face. He carried the light to the next room and looked about; but there was neither sign nor symptom of any one's presence, dead or living.

"Imagination, and nothing else," he whispered in the ear of Father Andrew. And he most sincerely hoped himself that it *was* imagination; that Rupert was not there.

They assisted Mrs. Pomeroy forward. She leaned heavily upon them; all strength seemed to have left her. A gust came in at the broken window and extinguished the light. She shrieked and shuddered.

"We can find our way in the moonlight," said the priest to her. "Make an effort to rally your strength. Do you know that your hands are bleeding, and must be attended to?"

Meanwhile, the news had spread: the very thing Leolin wished to avoid took place—the servants had become acquainted with the trouble. Three of the maids were lingering in the quadrangle for a gossip—for in truth, so numerous were the domestics at Pomeroy, they could only indulge in continual gossip to while away the time—when the light in the west tower struck upon their astonished eyes; the light carried by Leolin Pomeroy. They saw it being flashed about, to this side and that; they saw two figures moving within, and recognized one, round and jolly, for that of Father Andrew. It is not in human nature to keep marvels to one's self. This was indeed a marvel; and the women ran about in excitement, calling to their fellow-

servants in covert whispers, and pointing out the light in the haunted casement. Bridget, not to be outdone, explained it—the lord's ghost was there to-night. She had seen it, and her mistress had seen it; and her mistress, all so bravely, had gone up to—to—get speech of it, but had been, no doubt, overpowered with fright. Bridget, while she thought it was Rupert, would have been silent to martyrdom: but the ghost of the dead lord was legitimate property.

"That we—that I could have been so deceived, madam!" murmured Bridget, as she bathed Mrs. Pomeroy's temples with Cologne water, when the latter had been conveyed to her room, laid upon her bed, and her hands attended to.

"Deceived?" repeated Mrs. Pomeroy.

"In thinking it was poor Mr. Rupert up there. As if he would venture home again!" And Alice Pomeroy only answered by a moan of pain.

"But their figures were as like as twin peas, when living, and the outline of their features too," pursued Bridget, who could have talked of the wondrous theme till morning. "Madam," she went on, sinking her voice, "I saw his lip all this way off."

Terror had left Mrs. Pomeroy in a sadly low and subdued state, but the words somewhat aroused her. How was she to know that any one but herself had seen the startling sight? Bridget explained.

"It rose up, as from the floor, and stood right before the window in the moonlight. At the same time the room was momentarily lighted from the inside, rendering him distinct and clear. Lady Anna saw it also, madam, and it frightened her sadly."

"I wonder I did not die," gasped Mrs. Pomeroy. "I would rather die than see it again—and be alone with it. Bridget, I should like to be left for a few minutes with Father Andrew. Send to him."

Bridget was turning away in search of the priest, when a cry from her mistress called her back again.

"You are not going to leave me!" uttered Mrs. Pomeroy imploringly, grasping Bridget's arm and sleeve. "Send, I said. Can I ever, think you, be left alone again?"

CHAPTER XI.

BRIDGET'S TALE.

MEANWHILE, during all this commotion, the Lady of Pomeroy and her sister-in-law, Joan, remained unconscious of it. Shut up in their room in the south tower, they neither saw nor heard aught to disturb them; nor, as yet, was any word brought to alarm them. The tea-tray had been brought in, and they prepared to enjoy the simple refreshment after their day of fasting.

It was while Joan was busying herself with the cups that they heard a sound as of the breaking of glass. Sybilla smiled. The conversation had been of the gloomiest, and she was glad to seize on any little pretext to enliven it.

"One of them has dropped a glass of some kind," she said, alluding to the servants. "In carrying it through the cloisters, the wind may——"

"Hush, Sybilla! Listen."

Sybilla looked up, slightly surprised at Joan's movements. The tea-pot she was lifting remained suspended over the tray; her head was raised, her ear turned in the act of listening.

"What is it, Joan?"

For answer, Miss Pomeroy made a quick movement to enjoin silence. And for some moments both ladies listened attentively, one of them not knowing why or wherefore.

"I thought I heard a shriek," observed Joan, beginning to pour out the tea. "A prolonged shriek, as from one in pain or terror."

"It must have been the wind, Joan."

"I don't think it was the wind. It sounded like a real intense cry of pain. Go on with your story, Sybilla. What did you and George do when you saw that it was indeed one of those venomous snakes? I should not like to live in India," added Joan. "In the matter of snakes, and such things, I should be a great coward."

Sybilla concluded the reminiscence she was relating; and they continued to converse quietly until tea was over. Joan then left the room to pay a promised visit to Lady Anna.

The wind whistled and shrieked as she went through the passages, almost as if it would shake the very foundations of the abbey. In the lower corridor she disturbed a group of excited and frightened housemaids, and caught the theme of their conversation—the wonderful event of the night. Confused, dismayed, Joan's very blood seemed to freeze in her veins, as she listened. She made her way at once into the presence of Leolin.

Leolin had only then come in from his wife's chamber. Anna wanted reassuring as much as any one. The chess-board stood on the small table under the silver lamp, the men were just in the position that Leolin and Father Andrew had left them, the game remained unfinished.

"What is this horror that is running through the abbey?" whispered Joan, her dark face colourless. "What is it they are saying now?"

"That Guy is not at rest; that his spirit is abroad to-night," gloomily replied Leolin, who was not in the best of humours. "That is what they say."

"Has—he—appeared?" questioned Joan, her tone one that at another time Leolin might have laughed at. "To whom?"

"To Mrs. Pomeroy. She went into the west tower, and saw it standing against the picture; we found her senseless. Anna saw it from her rooms; it was at the casement then; and Bridget also. I tell you, Joan, I am only repeating what they say."

"They could not mistake it—Bridget and Mrs. Pomeroy?"

"Hardly,—if they *did* see it. Other faces may be mistaken, but not Guy's."

Joan Pomeroy clasped her hands upon her chest in pain. "Leolin—I have felt—I have felt—that Guy was not at rest. Even this very evening, when the wind was wailing and sighing round the abbey, it seemed to whisper that the dead were abroad; I remarked it to Sybilla. And I thought

of Guy, of poor Guy, as I said it. They were too true, the tales that were told of his appearing after his death."

"Nonsense, Joan. You are old enough to have lived down that superstition of yours. I confess there's something in the affair to-night that I don't understand: but, a ghost!—nonsense!"

Joan had drawn one of the green velvet chairs, the carving of its dark frame so old and beautiful, nearer her brother. She sat looking at him.

"I wish Father Andrew were here!" she mechanically said, following out her own troubled thoughts.

"Father Andrew is with Mrs. Pomeroy. He intended to remain with her until Norris came—who could not be found at once. Her hands are cut badly, I fancy."

"Leolin, you speak in riddles," cried Miss Pomeroy, who in her perplexity had not taken in all Leolin had said. "What has she done to her hands?"

"Don't you know? She flung them, in her terror, through the panes in the haunted room; to attract attention and bring help."

"It's a riddle still. What could have taken her—her—to the haunted room?"

"Bridget offered a curious explanation—that movements had been seen in the west tower; and they concluded, both she and her mistress, that it was Rupert."

"Why, Rupert is in bed and asleep," returned Joan, imperfectly comprehending yet. "What did she think would take him to the west tower? And why should Mrs. Pomeroy be looking after Rupert?"

"Joan! Not the boy. Rupert the wanderer."

Joan Pomeroy gazed at her brother, a darker shade passing over her face when she realized the sense of the words. A lively fear seized upon her.

"It could not be Rupert. *Could* it, Leolin?"

"No, no; he would not be so mad. Besides, how could he get up to the west wing? The keys were in their places. Bridget fetched them for Mrs. Pomeroy, that she might go up."

Joan threw back her head in haughty displeasure.

"*She went up!* What induced her to go? Had she not done evil enough, and entailed evil enough, by stealthily creeping up nine years ago? Why did she do it, Leolin?"

"You have not understood me, Joan. She saw, or fancied she saw, some one moving within the room, and she feared it might be Rupert; Bridget no doubt confirming her in the thought; and she went up to warn him of the risk he was running. I believe her motive for once was a good one."

"And——? Go on, please."

"She found no sign of Rupert; but she saw, as she says, *Guy*. Frightened beyond control, she dashed her hands through the casement, and screamed to attract notice from below. Bridget was on the watch; she came here to me with the tale, and I went up with Father Andrew."

"And—did you see anything?" shivered Joan.

"Yes. We saw Mrs. Pomeroy lying in a fainting-fit under the broken casement, her hands bleeding."

"I mean anything else, Leolin?"

"There could have been nothing else to see."

But matters could not remain, even for the night, as they were. The terrified servants must be appeased if possible, the west wing must be locked up again. Joan passed on to Lady Anna, Leolin went below to the servants, who were hanging about. He bade them accompany him into the west wing to examine the rooms, previously to shutting them up. But the superstitious crew hung back, each one thinking that *he* would not be of the expedition. Leolin was angered.

"There are enough of you," cried he, sarcastically—"are you afraid to venture in numbers? Are *you* afraid, Jeffs?—an old man, like you!"

"No, no, sir, I'll go for 'one," replied Jeffs. "It shan't be said that the oldest retainer of the family, Jerome excepted, was afraid of the lord he served, living or dead."

But Jeffs did not speak with the greatest possible amount of courage. He had been coachman to the Pomeroy's for three generations. First to the old lord; then to the ill-fated Guy, at whose marriage he nearly lost his life; then,

during his brief reign, to Leolin; and now to the young child, Rupert. But this did not render Jeffs any the more brave to-night. Jeffs was sixty years old, if he was a day, therefore it was altogether unreasonable of Jeffs to be afraid of ghosts. Perhaps Jeffs felt it so, for he put on a careless manner, took a light to lead the way, went a few paces with a jaunty step, and then turned and asked who was coming with him.

Example is contagious. Several of them now pressed after Jeffs, Bridget and two or three of the other maids amid them. Cox came bustling up: he had been to his key-closet.

"The keys of the west wing are not there, sir," he observed to Leolin.

"No. And, by the way, I wonder where the keys are?" added Leolin. "Whether Mrs. Pomeroy brought them down with her? Go you up and wait for me in the first room: I will inquire of Mrs. Pomeroy."

They moved forward, bearing several lights, huddling together, and talking in undertones. Passing through the north tower, they came to a halt in the first room of the west wing, as ordered. Jeffs threw his light around, to make sure nothing uncanny was there. The wind howled dismally, shaking the casements.

"I say, Jeffs, does Mr. Leolin think anybody's concealed in these rooms?" asked Markham, one of the footmen.

"The blessed patron saint of the Pomeroy's only knows," responded Jeffs. "He may fear somebody's been playing a trick upon Mrs. Pomeroy."

"Such nonsense!—as if he could think that!" dissented Bridget. "As if any mortal body could get through rooms that have been locked up for years?"

"Bridget, what did it look like?"

"Why, it looked—exactly as the lord used to look when he was among us: you may just think back upon him at any time that your memory serves. Just so his spirit looked to-night—save that his face was whiter and more ghastly. I was the first to see him, you know," added Bridget, proud of being able to say as much. "It was the

very night he was buried ; not many hours after the funeral. He looked then as he looked to-night."

"Not with the shattered face?" shuddered a questioner. "What a face it was! None of us women dared lift the cloth to look, as he lay dead."

Bridget shook her head. "Spirits don't reappear with the marks of what sends them out of the world, but as they were when they moved about in it. Witness the poor nun. When was she ever seen but in the full beauty of her face and form—and was she not picked up out of the courtyard a dreadful sight to look upon, and so put into her grave? But her spirit came back perfect: and so it is with the Lord of Pomeroy."

"Tell us that tale again, Bridget—about your seeing him the night of the funeral."

"It was thus," said Bridget, nothing loth. "Yea will remember when the lord lay in state, how the people came from miles around to see him, and then to attend his funeral. Not a soul, poor or rich, ill or well, missed it, or would miss it, except my sister, poor Avice, who died not so very long after. She was ill then, and near her time besides, and she didn't want to come; her husband didn't want her to come; she said that if she saw the lord in that shattered state, she should never get him out of her mind. Sick folk are fanciful, you know."

"She would not have seen anything amiss. She need not have looked at the face."

"Well, she was afraid; and come she wouldn't. But she made me promise to go to her when the funeral was over, and tell her about it, that she might appear as wise as her neighbours—for she didn't mean to let it be known abroad that she did not go."

"It was a brave funeral,"

"Never a braver. More crowded even than the old lord's had been: the death was unusual, you see, and it brought the people from far and wide. You couldn't get into the chapel for the throng; half of them had to kneel outside. And the priests! such a number! Father Andrew was nobody amongst 'em. Well, I did not forget my promise to

Avise; and at dusk I started. It was a squally, gloomy night: I wrapped my black shawl well round me, and put my best foot first, to get back soon and relieve the lady's-maid, Theresa, who had taken charge to watch the baby for me while she slept—little Miss Mary; and I chose the field way, simpleton that I was, because it was a bit nearer. You know those haystacks in the hollow?"

Bridget had paused before the last few words, and changed her tone to one of awe. Her listeners gathered more closely round her, their lights flaring on the dark wainscoting of the room.

"Some rain began to fall just as I reached the haystacks—there were fewer of them that year than this; and I looked up at the sky all round, wondering whether it was going to be a heavy shower, for I did not want to spoil my new mourning. As I turned my face forward again, I saw a figure close to me: where it had come from, unless it rose up out of the earth, I could not tell: it was—it was——Hark! what's that?" shrieked Bridget.

They crossed themselves and shuddered; one and all. Some sort of hollow noise was certainly heard from the direction of the west tower.

"It was nothing but the wind," cried Cox, who despised the extreme superstition of his fellow-servants. "How fanciful you are!"

"Yes, yes, it was the wind," added Jeffs. "Perhaps a door slammed. Go on with your tale, Bridget." For this same tale had its fascinations for the audience, though most of them had heard it many a time before.

"Where was I?" commented Bridget. "Oh—just where the figure had risen up before me. It was that of the poor dead lord, whom we had just been putting into his grave. I saw him plainly. I saw his dead-looking eyes and his hare-lip, and then I seized hold of the haystack and pushed my face into it, scratching it all over, and screamed out ten thousand murders. Brill heard me in his cottage, a field and a half off, and came to me."

"And the apparition. Where did it go?"

"How can I tell? It vanished as it came. Brill got me

home to the abbey—and it was all hushed up. I have never gone by those haystacks at dark since by myself, and I hope I never shall go.”

“One of the keeper’s boys saw him too,” interposed Jeffs, in a whisper. “I think it was that same night. The boy was coming through the hollow, and there stood the lord against the field-gate. The dog would not go past. Dumb animals have a mortal dread of apparitions; worse than we have. Other people saw him too.”

“Ay, ay,” put in Bridget again, “the lord has never been at rest. And he never will be until—but I am afraid to say it.”

“To say what? There’s nobody here but ourselves, Bridget.”

“Well, then, as long as he, who sent him out of the world, lives in it. When Mr. Rupert’s gone to join him, then the lord’s poor troubled spirit will be laid.”

A strange and startling interruption ensued. Jeffs, not feeling altogether reassured as to the noise they had heard, had kept his face turned to the rooms whence it came, the doors of which stood open, when he saw, or thought he saw, a figure moving towards them. The man’s heart leaped into his mouth; his hair rose on end. Jeffs did not speak, but he touched some of the rest and pointed.

Through the moon’s rays that fell slanting on the floors, it was gliding towards them, a tall, ghastly figure of towering height, with a glazed, livid face. Terrified, tongue-tied, they stood there, gazing in horror, heart and impulse alike frozen; when the only open door now intervening between it and them suddenly and violently closed.

Helter-skelter, pêle-mêle, downstairs they rushed, the brave Jeffs and his torch foremost in the company, and Bridget in their midst. Father Andrew met them in the cloisters. Mrs. Pomeroy could not tell what she had done with the keys.

The priest rated them soundly. He told Jeffs he ought to be ashamed of himself for an old simpleton, and he insisted upon their returning to lock the doors and bring away the keys, which must be somewhere up there.

No, not for a thousand worlds! Not even in obedience to his reverence, would they again encounter the ghost of the Lord of Pomeroy.

The priest saw he must go himself, if anything was to be done. Snatching the light from Jeffs, he went on rapidly, bidding them follow him. Of course it is well known that a ghost dare not venture near a priest, especially one who keeps a sacred relic in his pocket, as it was supposed the father kept, and they scrambled after him. Bridget, her superstitious curiosity overpowering her fears, did not remain behind. Say what you will, there is a fascination in ghosts, and no one can deny it.

"You muffs! You geese!" reproachfully spoke the father, striding on, and throwing the light of the torch round the several rooms as he passed through them, disclosing nothing but tranquillity and emptiness. "What is there to be afraid of? I would not have these poltroons of brains of yours, to be made a cardinal to-morrow."

"Father"—and you may be sure it was Bridget who spoke, for a woman's tongue is always ready—"if there was nothing here, what has shut all the doors? They were open before."

"What? Why, the wind."

"Oh, but just think, father—if the wind slams one door, it would not slam a dozen in succession," objected the persistent Bridget.

On went the father with as quick a step as his size allowed; very scornful was he over their folly. The rooms were perfectly empty; the haunted room, when they gained it, looked as though it had not been disturbed for ages—save that the keys were lying on the faded velvet settle.

"Now then," cried the priest, swaying his light about, "are you convinced there's nothing here; and that there has been nothing? The lord's ghost indeed! Just as much as yours; and you have not become ghosts yet."

Jeff shook his obstinate old head and spoke up. "All the same, your reverence, I *saw* it. The rest saw it."

"Saw a moonbeam," scoffed the priest.

He marshalled them before him, locking every door in

succession with his own hand; locking up the north tower last of all. With an admonition not to be so silly again, the priest then dismissed the servants their several ways, and proceeded to the room where he had been disturbed at chess. Leolin entered at the same moment.

"Shall we finish our game?" asked the father equably, moving to the chess-table.

"Father, what is this trouble that is disturbing the peace of the abbey?" cried Leolin passionately, ignoring the priest's proposal.

"Moonshine," quietly replied Father Andrew. "There never was such an ignorant, superstitious set of servants as yours. Their folly would upset the gravity of a colony of saints."

"I know it has upset me," remarked Leolin, wiping his brow.

Father Andrew looked at him in surprise, hardly knowing how to take the avowal.

"Upset you, my son!" he repeated, suppressing a laugh. "Has the ghost story infected you?"

"Ghost!" retorted Leolin, with pain, "it is not that. Did you not understand, father? I thought it was *Rupert* there: that he had come back again. I surely thought it. I am not altogether at ease yet."

"But that's not likely."

"It would not be the first time he has ventured to England, you know. Good Heavens, what will be done?"

"Now look here," said the priest: "you are tormenting yourself unnecessarily. There's neither rhyme nor reason in such a fancy as that. There can't be. For my part, I would sooner believe in the ghost than the other notion; I would—of the two; it's too improbable. Rupert Pomeroy would no more dare to venture here; here, to the abbey; than he would put himself voluntarily into a lion's mouth. Rest assured of that, my son."

Leolin drew a sigh of relief. It was only at moments that the fear recurred to him: with the priest, his common sense told him that it was well-nigh impossible.

"And here are the keys," said the priest, depositing the

bunch upon a black marble console. "I have locked up all the rooms securely."

Leolin took the keys in his hand. He intended to keep them himself for the future, instead of returning them to Cox the custodian.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. WYLDE.

BOWLING along to Pomeroy Abbey, on the day following the commotion, went Mrs. Wylde in her well-appointed chariot attended by her servants. The high wind had gone down; the October day was calm and fair.

As with Father Andrew, Mrs. Wylde's bulk increased with years. She was now a very large lady indeed; and her fate in this respect appeared to be so indisputable that she was fain to accept it and cease to struggle against it. Mrs. Wylde was not less addicted to fine plumage than of old. Her attire this morning was a judicious mixture of violet and white satin; the gown violet, the bonnet white. Her comely face, shaded within its array of lace and feathers, was somewhat less comely than usual. At any rate, less at ease; for it wore an expression of anxious perplexity.

In distress or trouble, a young woman naturally turns to her mother; for sympathy, if not always for refuge. Mrs. Pomeroy had passed a most wretched night. Her maid, Theresa, had slept on a sofa in the same apartment, for she dreaded to be alone. Her hands gave her some pain; her mental discomfort gave her more; and when breakfast was over, she despatched Bridget to the White House to ask her mother to come to her.

Be very sure Bridget did not fail to make use of the opportunity. Five minutes after she entered, Mrs. Wylde was in possession of the whole story: the dead Lord of Pomeroy had "come again," and was terrifying the whole abbey out of its propriety.

"I thought nothing less at first, ma'am, but that it was Mr. Rupert," confessed Bridget, dropping her voice, knowing that to her mistress's mother she was safe in whispering the dangerous suspicion: "and a fine fright it put me into, lest he should be seen. For we all know what might come of *that*."

"You had seen—this same appearance—for a week past?" returned Mrs. Wylde, that one avowal having made a strong impression upon her.

"Every blessed night since yesterday was a week, ma'am, had I seen some stir in the haunted room. Now and again I caught a glimpse of a tall figure; and I could only believe it to be Mr. Rupert. It never occurred to me to think of the dead lord."

"Are my daughter's hands badly cut?" resumed Mrs. Wylde, after a pause.

"Well, yes, ma'am, rather so. But Mr. Norris says it might have been worse. I left him dressing them this morning."

Dismissing the woman with a message that she would be at the abbey in the course of the morning, Mrs. Wylde sat on revolving the news. And the conclusion she came to was not agreeable.

Supernatural appearances held no place in Mrs. Wylde's belief. That Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, should return to trouble the earth after having been decently buried, she held to be most unreasonable. But she did fear very much, just as did Leolin, that it might be Rupert the wanderer.

"And how frightfully imprudent of Alice, believing this, to go up after Rupert to the west tower! Nothing pleasant could come of that. Alice did it with a good motive of course; to warn him, as Bridget says; and it was kind of her to risk it—but if the news got abroad what would the neighbourhood say? Better, a great deal better, that Alice should have seen her husband's ghost than met Rupert—that is, fancied it; it could have been nothing but fancy. But if it was in truth Rupert up there—and he were to be discovered, and taken—what a dreadful catastrophe it would

be! Not only for himself and the Pomeroys, but for Alice; for it would recall to the public mind the almost forgotten scandal of nine years ago."

These were the reflections that were running through Mrs. Wylde's mind and clouding her face as she drove to Pomeroy. She found Alice lying on a sofa in one of the front rooms, Theresa sitting at work at the window.

"I dare not be alone, mamma, after the horrors of last night," murmured Alice, as she sent the maid away. "You have heard, I suppose?"

"Yes, child; Bridget has told me. But it is very ridiculous of you to be frightened. Let me look at your hands."

"They are badly cut. Mr. Norris said the bandages were not to be touched."

"Quite right, I dare say. And now, tell me, Alice, how you could be so imprudent as to go up to that west tower."

"I did it under a misapprehension," said Alice, lowering her voice. "I thought that it was Rupert come back again. Bridget said it was he."

"And if it had been Rupert!—all the more reason for your keeping away," spoke Mrs. Wylde, unable to keep severity out of her tone.

"I went to warn him to escape, nothing more; I should not have stayed a minute. His being there—if it had been he—was so frightfully hazardous."

"All the same, you should not have gone. You might have sent Bridget. You had had enough, one would think, of going up to the west tower nine years ago."

Alice burst into tears. "It is generous of you, mamma, to bring up that to me!"

"Because you are so very incautious, Alice. You and Rupert Pomeroy ought to be as far divided as the poles—and one would suppose your own good feeling would teach you that."

"I did it for the best," urged Alice. "There was no one else to go; no one but me. As to Bridget, she would not have gone alone to the west tower to save her life. Think

what it would be for us all, as well as for himself, if he were taken."

"Well, it is a good thing that nothing worse has come of it. I hope you are now convinced that it was not Rupert Pomeroy."

"Ay, indeed. It was foolish of me to admit the idea—and of Bridget too. He would not be likely to venture here. And he could not have got into the rooms."

"Don't take up any fancy again so wildly ridiculous," spoke Mrs. Wyldé sharply: for she had no intention of allowing her daughter to know what she suspected—that it must really be Rupert who was in the west tower.

"But oh, mamma, when I saw—what I did see, I—I—I cannot talk of it," she added, breaking off with a shudder. "You know—you have heard—that my husband appeared to me."

"I know that you must have been in a highly excited and nervous state, to imagine anything of the sort," corrected Mrs. Wyldé. "No wonder: you had been in the chapel the best part of the long day, and made a fast-day of it into the bargain. When the brain is highly wrought from want and weariness, it is apt to play us strange tricks."

"Mother, it was no delusion. That I saw my husband last night," she solemnly added, "I will stake my soul."

"Hush!" said Mrs. Wyldé.

"He appeared to me in the spirit," added Alice, lifting one of her damaged hands in her earnestness, and letting it rest on the arm of Mrs. Wyldé. "I wonder I did not die, there and then. Were I ever to see it again when gone, I should die. It was only my fainting away that saved me."

"Are you a child, Alice, that you should fancy these things?"

"Not to me-only did he appear, but to others," went on Alice. "Bridget saw him at the west window; Lady Anna saw him there. And when the servants went up afterwards to lock up the rooms—you have heard in what way they were startled, mamma, by seeing an awful figure bearing down upon them?"

"I have heard that they say so."

"What figure could that have been but his?"

Mrs. Wylde did not answer this time. In her own mind she believed it to be another's. A living figure, not a dead one.

"Jeffs declares he recognized the lord; he saw all his features—including the lip. No one who knew him well could be mistaken in his appearance, mother. And surely you are no stranger to the reports that have been whispered ever since his death! The peace of the abbey has been marred by them."

"Well, Alice, have it your own way."

"I wish there was any other way; but you must know there is not," sighed Alice.

Mrs. Wylde fell into a fit of musing: she was naturally a shrewd, far-seeing woman. That nothing she could urge would shake her daughter's faith in this supernatural appearance, was evident: and she began to reflect that, of the two evils, it was better to let her rest in the belief; ay, in spite of the fear and torment it induced; than that she should have her doubts directed to the only feasible explanation—Rupert.

"Alice," she resumed, "I have never seen a ghost myself, and that makes me sceptical. I have heard that some people do see such things; that they are so constituted; and so—we will drop the subject. I came here intending to take you home with me. Will you come?"

"What, with these hands! I could not go out to-day, mamma."

"It will be better for you to come to me altogether, Alice."

"Altogether! Why, mamma, what do you mean?"

"Listen, Alice. This old abbey is a hotbed of superstition. It was always noted for it, and it has grown worse of late years. The very atmosphere teems with superstition; the servants are given over to it. My opinion is, that they employ their leisure hours in inventing marvels, and then frighten themselves into the belief that they are real. It is no longer a desirable home for you—you shall come back to me."

Alice shook her head. "You are very kind, mamma; you mean well: but nothing would induce me to leave the abbey. My interests lie within it."

"What interests?"

"Mary's interests: and hers are mine. There are people living who would be capable of destroying those interests; I must be here to protect them."

Mrs. Wylde scarcely understood; and Alice continued.

"Mary shall sometime be Lady of Pomeroy; I have made my mind up to that. Her father was lord, she shall in her turn be lady."

"By what means would you make her so?"

"By her marriage with young Rupert."

Mrs. Wylde positively shrank at the words. She had had enough of scheming, herself, when she schemed to make this, her own daughter, Lady of Pomeroy by her marriage with Guy. What had come of it!

"Oh, Alice, don't plan!" she urged, her voice taking quite a wailing tone. "Don't, don't! Be content to leave things to the good care of Heaven. And they are both children yet."

"Of course: we cannot act against Heaven," returned Alice, more pointed indifference in her manner than her mother liked to see. "But—to return to the question. This is my home, mamma, and I assure you I have no intention of quitting it."

"Only for two or three weeks, then; for two or three weeks, Alice. Until this excitement shall have worn away."

Alice rather wondered at her mother's persistency—she seemed quite agitated. "Thank you, mamma, but it cannot be. When my hands are better, I will bring Mary, and spend a long day with you."

Upon taking her departure, Mrs. Wylde saw the French governess in the study, and stepped in. Mademoiselle de Garonne seized the opportunity to speak of the previous night's disturbance, confessing that it had made her uncomfortable. She did not like "revenants."

"But I don't believe a word of it," cried Mrs. Wylde.

"Servants are so ignorant on these subjects, so superstitious and fanciful. You must know that, mademoiselle."

"As a rule, they are," admitted mademoiselle, speaking in English for the benefit of Mrs. Wylde, who did not understand French. "But this that was seen last night—it was not only the servants who saw it, but Mrs. Pomeroiy and Lady Anna. I admit that I never saw a revenant myself; I confess that I hardly know whether to believe in such appearances or not: but, I must say, that to live where one may be subjected to seeing one is rather unpleasant."

"Put yourself at ease, ma'mselle; don't think at all about it," advised Mrs. Wylde, in reassuring tones. "I would stake this pearl brooch of mine that nothing will appear to you."

"Thank you; indeed I hope not. But, to pass myself out of the question," continued the governess, "it is not well that Miss Mary should hear of these things; not well. The impressionable mind of a child should be guarded from such ideas."

"I fully agree with you in that, ma'mselle."

"We had hardly begun the devoirs this morning when Miss Mary interrupted them to ask whether I had seen the revenant. Madame Wylde, this ought not to be. In spite of all my care she may grow up a very model of superstition."

"That shall not be if I can hinder it," concluded Mrs. Wylde. "Good-morning to you, my dear ma'mselle."

Passing down the stairs and out of the gateway, Mrs. Wylde made a sign to her carriage not to follow her, and walked round the abbey towards Father Andrew's. His little house was at the far side of the chapel. Old Marget said her master was at home, and unceremoniously ushered the visitor into the little sitting-room, where sat the priest at his early dinner.

"Beans and bacon, my favourite dish," said he in his hospitable manner. "Will you take some, Mrs. Wylde? It's not often she gives it me."

Mrs. Wylde thanked him and declined. She entered at

once upon the errand that had brought her, the priest turning from the table to listen.

"I want you to use your influence with my daughter to come to my house for a time," said Mrs. Wylde, after some little conversation, chiefly touching the previous night, had passed. • "One might as well try to shake that abbey down"—pointing her delicately-gloved hand towards the window—"as shake her belief in the fancy that her husband appeared to her. It is pitiable to see her—casting her terrified eyes into every corner. She would be so much better at my house, father."

"So she would," assented the priest.

"But she won't come; she won't listen to me: nothing will induce her, she says, to quit the abbey. Do you think you could prevail upon her?"

"I'll try," said the priest. "But—once Mrs. Pomeroy takes a notion into her head, you can't get it out again. She is fond of her own will, you see: she's like a Pomeroy for that."

Mrs. Wylde lowered her voice, looking round to make sure that the door was closed against Marget's ears: though, indeed, the old woman could be heard clattering about in the kitchen.

"*She ought to come*, Father Andrew; she ought not to remain at the abbey just now. Should it in truth be Rupert Pomeroy up in those west rooms, hiding there for refuge, it is better that she should not find it out. There is no knowing what chivalrous thing she might be attempting by way of aiding him. Nothing unseemly; no, of course not; I do not mean that; no one could fear that for her now: but, give only the slightest loophole for gossip, and all the old scandal, that I am sure, poor thing, she has been trying her best to live down, would be raked up again."

"But what can induce you to surmise that it is Rupert?" objected the priest. "It is no more Rupert than it is me. With all his want of caution, he would not put his head into jeopardy. I said as much to Leolin Pomeroy last night."

"Does he fear it is Rupert?"

"He did. Against all the laws of common sense."

"Then what do you think it was that they did see? Guy's ghost?"

"It could have been nothing but the wind," said the father, after a moment's pause. "Nothing but the wind. Why, I feared my roof, here, would have been blown off. The wind startled them to begin with, and they conjured up the rest. They are always ready primed for seeing ghosts on the seventeenth of October."

"And what an improper place the abbey is just now for the child!" resumed Mrs. Wylde—"all these ghostly tales floating about it. Mademoiselle de Garonne has just spoken to me: Mary has been asking her if she saw the revernon last night—or whatever the French name for ghost is. For the child's sake, Alice ought not to keep her there."

Father Andrew nodded assent. "Have you suggested that phase of the matter to your daughter?"

"No; to say the truth, it had not then occurred to me. But I will suggest it. The child knows all about last night, mademoiselle says: she is just one of those children that you cannot keep things from. You must talk to Mrs. Pomeroy yourself, father."

"I will," said the priest. "I'll see her to-day."

Back started Mrs. Wylde for the abbey, leaving the good priest to his beans and bacon. Old Jerome was standing at the keep-door as she passed. She stopped to speak to him.

"Have you heard this nonsense that they are talking—about last night?" she presently asked. And the old man's lips turned white as he answered that he had heard it.

"He is as full of superstition as the rest," thought Mrs. Wylde. And she continued her way to the abbey, and reopened the conference with her daughter.

But no. Mrs. Pomeroy, to use her mother's words, was harder than adamant. She perfectly recognized the justice of the representation as regarded Mary, and said she would send the child to the convent to be out of the way; but she would not stir from the abbey herself.

As Mrs. Wylde, vexed and disappointed, was finally passing out to her carriage, she saw Leolin Pomeroy coming round from the path that led to the rocks. On the impulse of the moment she turned aside and spoke to him.

"What a disagreeable affair this is, Mr. Pomeroy, that they are saying has happened—about your poor brother Guy! He *could* not have been seen, could he? The thing does not stand to reason."

Every haughty line in Leolin's face grew more haughty at the abrupt address. He had never taken cordially to Mrs. Wylde, any more than he had to her daughter: that she should presume to speak of this *to him* tried his temper.

"There's Alice nearly out of her mind with it," continued Mrs. Wylde, hardly waiting for his answer. "It is so very absurd! I fear we must look to a more tangible fear than that of ghosts."

"What do you mean, madam?" asked Leolin.

"What I fear is, that it must be Rupert," spoke Mrs. Wylde, her voice sinking to the veriest whisper. "Father Andrew says no; but I cannot come to any other conclusion."

In any dread that may be privately haunting us, how greatly that dread may be augmented by a single word of confirmation, spoken by another, we all know too well. Leolin despised Mrs. Wylde, deemed it little less than a piece of insolence for her to have mentioned the subject to him at all: nevertheless her opinion painfully impressed him, strengthening the fear which he had been striving all the morning to drive away. He would not let this be seen; he turned the subject off with almost a jest, changing his tone to one of civility as he walked with her to hand her into her carriage.

She drove off, nodding to him. Leolin lifted his hat with a smile, and then put it on to cover a brow of perplexity and pain.

CHAPTER XIII

WITH MR. HILDYARD.

IN one of the most exclusive of our west-end clubs, amidst its brilliant gas-lights, the warmth of its fires, and its sociability, sat Leolin Pomeroy. He had arrived in London some two hours before, had dined at his hotel; and now, though the night was getting on, had come to "take a look in" at his club before going to rest. Very few members were there: as a rule, the great world is out of town in October.

"Going to make anything of a stay?" asked one of the friends he was talking to, the Duke of St. Ives.

"A day or so."

"Your visits are always flying ones, Pomeroy. How is your wife? Better?"

"Yes, much better. How did you know she was ill?"

"Essington told me so the other day when he dropped in here."

"But Essington is not in town, is he?"

"They are all in town. Halting here for a week before they go on to Germany. Cardine's in trouble again, I fancy."

"No doubt: Cardine's seldom out of it," remarked Leolin.

"It must try his father."

"Yes. Were I Lord Essington, I should make short work of it—leave him to his own devices."

The Duke of St. Ives, good-hearted as ever, shook his head to this. "A great many fathers are tried in the same way, I fear. One can't help feeling for one's own son, you see, Pomeroy. Look at Winchester."

"Scamp!" briefly ejaculated Leolin. "Has he been heard of lately?"

"Not that I know of. By the way, yes. Grane, coming home through Paris the other day, met him there."

But these items of gossip do not concern us, and we must hasten on.

Leolin Pomeroy had remained so deeply imbued with the impression that it was Rupert who had been seen in the west wing, as to become intolerably uneasy. The whole day, after his brief interview with Mrs. Wylde, he had brooded over the fear, striving in vain to discard it; at evening, calling Father Andrew to be his companion, he went into the west wing, and searched the rooms: but they found nothing. After a night of torment, Leolin started for London to put the matter before Mr. Hildyard and get his opinion—which opinion seemed, judging by the frequency of these visits, to be to Leolin the panacea for all his ills.

Breakfast over in the morning, Leolin went to Lincoln's Inn, and asked for Mr. Hildyard. But it was the partner, Mr. Prael, who came to him.

"I am too early, I suppose," remarked Leolin. "Hildyard's not here yet?"

"He has not been here for three or four days now, Mr. Pomeroy," was the lawyer's answer. "I doubt whether he will ever be able to come again."

"Is he worse?"

"He has grown rapidly worse. I do fear we may not long have him with us. Can I do anything for you?"

"I am sorry: I am truly sorry!" lamented Leolin. "He looked very ill when I last saw him—and that's not a week ago; but I had no idea it was so serious as this. Thank you; no, I don't think you can: you do not understand our affairs, I fancy. I wonder whether Mr. Hildyard would be able to see me?"

"I dare say he would. I was with him yesterday for a couple of hours, talking over business matters. You can but try."

Leolin could not intrude thus early upon one who was ill; but at twelve o'clock he made his way to Russell Square, sent, in his card, and was admitted. At his desk, in a small study lined with books, apparently sorting old letters, sat Mr. Hildyard, worn, grey, and shrunken. He silently took the hand held out by Leolin, and kept it for some moments.

"I am so very sorry to see you like this," spoke Leolin,

whose heart was aching. Never, in all his life, had he seen any one so changed in a space of time that might be counted by hours.

"Ay. When the end sets in with a will, it makes quick work with some of us," was the answer. "But I am somewhat better to-day. What has brought you up again so soon?"

Leolin drew a chair near, bent forward, and entered upon his tale. The lawyer listened in silence, his elbow on the table, his hand partly shading his face. A smile crossed his lips when Leolin spoke of what had been seen in the west tower, and what it was supposed to be.

"A ghost! Your brother Guy's ghost? How silly people are!"

"Ever since Guy died, there has been uneasiness amongst the servants on that same score," spoke Leolin—who had never disclosed so much before.

"Uneasiness on *what* score?"

"What they maintain—what they say is, that Guy 'comes again.' Joan, I am sorry to say, puts absolute faith in it."

"The Pomeroy's were always given to superstition, more or less," remarked Mr. Hildyard. "But, to let it run the length of seeing a ghost in the west tower! How could fancy so mislead them? It was the wind, I suppose, playing upon the panes."

"Not altogether. Something must have been there, I take it: some person, I mean. A horrible fear, of whom it perhaps was, has lain upon me ever since."

"But who is that?" said Mr. Hildyard, not failing to perceive that Leolin was greatly moved.

"Rupert."

A long, silent pause. Ill though Mr. Hildyard was, the avowal startled him. He was the first to speak, after running over probabilities in his mind.

"I think you must be mistaken. Of all places on the habitable world, Rupert would surely shun Pomeroy. He would never dare to venture there."

"He ventured to England once, you know."

"And that once must have sufficed to show him his folly."

"We cannot know it. Bridget's idea was, that he had taken refuge in the west tower as the safest place; the place where he would be the least liable to be looked for. The woman has shrewd sense. You remember her?"

"Quite well. But, look here: putting aside the extreme unlikelihood that Rupert would be guilty of such imprudence, every probability tells against it. How could he get up to the west wing? You say the keys were safe."

"It is a mystery to me altogether, and a very unpleasant one," said Leolin. "Since that woman, Bridget, suggested the thought to me, ten times an hour I say to myself, Is it possible? and I say that it may be. Rupert may have ventured a second time to these shores; and, driven to extremity, hunted from lair to lair in his fear of pursuit, may have pitched upon that refuge as being the one almost certain not to be suspected and searched."

"But you have searched—and found no one."

"Yes, but it was at night. And there may be nooks and corners that the light did not penetrate, or we see into. Any way, the fear, that he is hiding there, haunts me. Who knows but some secret closet may exist there?"

"How could he be fed?"

"I know not. Unless he has had Cox in his pay. I might suspect old Jerome were he at the abbey; but he is not. Jerome would run his very neck into a noose to serve or save a Pomeroy."

"Has Jerome got him shut up in the keep?" went on Mr. Hildyard. But he made the remark in simple pleasantry, his mind refusing to admit the possibility that Rupert could be at Pomeroy. And this Leolin detected. Rupert was in the west tower, if anywhere; not at the keep.

"And what is it that you wish me to do for you?—or, rather, Præd; for it must be he in future."

"I don't know what it is," confessed Leolin; "I don't know that anything can be done. The fact is, I am too uneasy to be at rest; and I came up to put the case before you and ask your opinion upon it; more especially to ask whether you have gained any clue latterly as to where Rupert is."

"Not the slightest," promptly replied Mr. Hildyard. "We have never heard of him at all since Collins left him on board the Spanish boat. Does the Lady of Pomeroy never hear from him?—her husband, George, used to."

Leolin shook his head. "We are not great friends, she and I, but she would be sure not to keep from me so grave a thing as any communication from Rupert. I' would almost give up my birthright to set the question at rest; to be assured of where Rupert is at this present moment," passionately added Leolin.

Mr. Hildyard understood perfectly what he meant by his "birthright:" the heirship to Pomeroy. He was beginning to look upon Leolin, in regard to that point, as partly demented.

"Have you any further news from Rome?" resumed the lawyer, following out his own thoughts.

"None. Rome is given to being dilatory."

"It always was, and always will be, when the Vatican itself is set against a thing."

"The Vatican is not set against this thing of mine," hotly spoke Leolin. "One or two of its people may use their influence against it; nothing more."

"Just so; it comes to the same."

Leolin rose. "I cannot take up your time longer—and to no purpose," he remarked. "I wish you could have advised me—or suggested some little ray of light."

"I think, were I you," slowly spoke Mr. Hildyard, "I should at once throw open that west wing. Open all the rooms one after another, doors and windows too, and let them remain open day and night."

But there might be objections to this plan; even as the lawyer spoke, they passed through Leolin's mind. If Rupert were indeed there, it might be fatal to him; might lead to his discovery: moreover, control in these matters was not vested in Leolin, but in Sybilla. So long as she ostensibly reigned, her will was law when she chose to exert it. And she had all along shown herself resolute in keeping the west wing unmolested.

"I trust I shall soon hear better news of you," said

Leolin, some slight tremor in his voice, as he gazed upon that fading face.

"There will be no 'better' for me in this world," was the lawyer's answer; "I feel that I now see you for the last time. Mr. Leolin, we have been good friends for many years, as client and advocate. I have served the Pomeroy family faithfully——"

"You have, you have," impulsively interrupted Leolin, pressing the hands that clasped his. "Never a more faithful friend than you."

"Then, will you pardon me if I presume upon that long friendship, those years of service, by giving to you a last word of advice? I do it as a dying man. *Prevail upon yourself to let the contest with Rome drop*—or, rather, the contest with the rights of the young child. You know what I have always said—that the cause is not a righteous one. I feel sure, I seem to see clearly, that Heaven does not and will not prosper it. Cease the vexatious strife, and thereby ensure peace to your conscience. You may need the comfort when you come to be as I am. It is for your own sake I advise this."

"I am sure it is, and I thank you," returned Leolin, warmly. "I thank you just as much as though I could take the advice. From your point of view it is only kind of you to give it. Oh—by the way—to go to another subject: I hear our people, the Essingtons, are in town."

"For a few days. Lord Essington was here, with Pracl, yesterday."

"Pracl did not tell me that this morning. He is rather close, I fancy: we shall not like him as well as we liked you. Cardine is all abroad again, I suppose."

"Abroad in more senses than one, this time. He has gone to Germany to be out of the way, leaving his father to settle up for him. Lord Essington has need of patience."

"Ay. Well, good-bye; good-bye, dear Mr. Hildyard. I wish I could hear of your getting better! I wonder what it is that has induced this grave illness."

The last words were spoken in that light tone we are all apt to use now and then in social converse, for Leolin

Pomeroy did know what had induced the illness. At least, he guessed. Mr. Hildyard was dying of that not very uncommon malady, a broken heart.

"Now, shall I go to Berkeley Square, or shall I not?" debated Leolin. "If I could make sure Essington was out, I would. I think I'll chance it."

For Leolin Pomeroy no longer cared to meet his father-in-law too often. For some time now, a coolness had existed between them. There had been no quarrel; but the older Lord Essington grew, the more strongly did he disapprove of Leolin's policy, to dispossess Rupert Pomeroy: and as the earl was open-natured and very much given to saying what he thought, Leolin kept out of his way.

Fortune favoured him. Lady Essington and Geraldine were at home, but not his lordship. Leolin sat down to luncheon with them.

They could converse unrestrainedly at the meal, as it was not their custom to have servants in attendance. Mabel was married; married well: but not to the Duke of St. Ives, who had never come forward again after Anna's rejection.

"And what of your wife?" asked Lady Essington. "Is she really growing strong?"

"I think so; I hope so," replied Leolin. "She had a very slight attack of ague a night or two ago—but something had occurred to put her out."

"What had occurred?"

"Oh, nothing particular. A little matter startled her."

"Grew frightened about her baby, I expect, poor girl: I'm sure I hope this one will live. It is very sad Anna should have had this nervous fever," added the countess.

"It was not a nervous fever."

"Bordering upon it."

"It was intermittent fever," contended Leolin, incipient resentment in his tone.

"They are much alike. We have spoken of it here as nervous fever all along. Her father thinks it was one."

"But I assure you it was not," persisted Leolin.

"Well, it is his opinion. He says he wonders Anna has not been worried into one before."

Leolin laid down his knife and fork, deeply offended. "What can you possibly mean by saying that?"

"It is her father who says it: I don't say it. I am sure he has Anna a great deal upon his mind. He thinks that this constant scheming, which goes on, tries her and tells upon her."

"What scheming!"

"With Rome, you know. To dispossess that little Pomeroy and put yourself in his place."

"It is by right my place," said Leolin.

"Of course you think so. I think with you, for that matter," avowed the countess. "But Anna and her father both look at it in the opposite light, you know; and he feels sure that Anna grows frightened at what the consequences may be; that she never has a truly happy moment. And he says if you don't mind, you'll lose her."

"I am extremely obliged to him," stiffly spoke Leolin. "I hope I can take better care of my wife than that. Perhaps you will tell him so, Lady Essington?"

"Perhaps I will not. What would be the use? Talking of trouble, here's Cardine in a plight again."

"Cardine is never out of a plight, is he?" returned Leolin, his good-humour not restored.

"When his father gets him out of it; never otherwise. We shall have to sell Hawk's Rest, I expect, this time. And now poor Hildyard must go and break up! As my husband says, it is one trouble upon another."

"I have just come from Hildyard; from Russell Square. How ill he looks! Dying, it seems to me."

"Ay. He received his death-blow when Lord Winchester ran off with Frances. There's another nice young man for you! Winchester and Cardine might have been running a race together to try which could get the deeper into debt. But I don't think Cardine would turn villain and break an old man's heart. Is Miss Pomeroy at the abbey now?"

"Yes: she came a few days ago. How is that pretty little friend of mine?" added Leolin, turning the con-

versation from the subject of the abbey. For it was not by any means his intention to disclose anything of the commotion just now agitating it, and he did not wish to be too closely questioned.

"Which little friend?"

"Annaline Hetley."

"Oh, poor little thing, she's at Naples, with her father and mother and the rest of them. Frank Hetley has succeeded in getting some small diplomatic post there. By the way, I think you helped him to it. It brings him in a trifle, and he has a trifle of his own, and I have no doubt Lord Essington makes up the rest. I tell my husband the world would not know what to do without him; he goes out of his way to help so many people."

Leolin privately wondered whether she knew that he was one of the helped; and, if so, to what extent. But no; he thought not. Open though the earl was, he could keep his own counsel.

"And when are you going back to Pomeroy, Leolin?" asked Lady Geraldine, who had in vain tried to get in a word before.

"To-night."

"And came up only yesterday! A short stay. You seem to be always running up and down."

"Yes, a short stay this time. I only wanted to say a word or two to Hildyard. And I am glad I came; for I suppose I shall never see him again."

And so, luncheon concluded, the day wore on. And by the night train Leolin travelled down to Pomeroy.

He found the place in a worse commotion than when he had left it. During each of the two nights of his absence, the shade of Guy Pomeroy had again been seen in the west tower. Amongst others, Norris the surgeon, cold, keen, and sceptical upon the subject of ghosts in general, had seen and recognized it.

Leolin knew not what to think, what to be at. Maintaining an outward appearance of haughty disbelief, inwardly he was tormented with fear. Not the same fear that agitated his retainers, but the more tangible fear of its being really

Rupert. That some one, or some thing, was positively haunting the west tower, he could not well disbelieve; the testimony to that effect was too general. Whilst telling his dependents that folly was running away with their senses, while visiting on them the severest displeasure that reproofs could convey, his own mind, as the days passed on, was kept in a state of intolerable torment. Every now and again, also, would a whisper be brought to Leolin that Rupert had been undoubtedly seen: but this was hushed up so far as it could be.

The days, I say, passed on. Far from any improvement setting in at Pomeroy, matters became more complicated. The peace of the abbey was gone. It was only too evident, to all who chose to exercise their sight, that the spirit of the unhappy Lord of Pomeroy did indeed haunt the spot where he had met his terrible death; that he could not rest in his grave. Night after night that figure was seen in the rooms; sometimes close to the window, the moon shining upon it; on darker nights, the watchers would see it surrounded by a faint light. Restless, ever restless was the spirit. Father Andrew had himself locked the doors, as he assured them with his own lips; but what of that? in every one of the rooms of the west wing would it appear in succession, gliding through them as only spirits can be supposed to glide.

Mrs. Pomeroy was wearing to a shadow. Terrified and awe-stricken though she was, she yet could not resist the fascination of the sight, but would sit at her window throughout the early part of the night, watching for it. When the form appeared, she would seize upon Bridget, who was generally her companion, and hide her face on the woman's arm, and sob and shiver in agony. "If this goes on, sir, it will kill her," whispered Bridget one day to Leolin. And he would have been too glad to stop it, had he known how to do so.

One evening Leolin took up his station in the haunted room, with Father Andrew and Cox the custodian: Cox being chosen not because he was the head of the retainers, but because he possessed more common sense than the

others, and was less affected by fears. Moreover, had Rupert appeared, Cox was to be trusted. Until dawn they watched, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. Entirely unmolested by sight or sound they remained.

That was not all. When the sun had risen, glinting the tops of the casements, and throwing out the angles and corners of the rooms into broad daylight, they made a thorough search; not a nook escaped them: but no signs could be discovered of any person or thing, supernatural or human; not a trace was there of the appearance so often seen, not the faintest clue as to what it might be. And Leolin and the priest, both convinced themselves, minutely examining the aspect and extent of the walls, that no hiding-place could be concealed within them. Leolin locked up the rooms again, his brain more exercised than ever.

Perhaps the only inhabitant of the abbey who absolutely refused credence to these superstitious fancies, was the Lady of Pomeroy. But, as Joan remarked, Sybilla had always been of strong mind. Her father, John Gaunt, could never be brought to put faith in the supernatural, and Sybilla was like him. She, making a half jest of it, recommended her domestics to keep their eyes at night off the west wing and tower, and no doubt the "ghost" would soon go away as he had come.

Easier said than done. Far rather would the servants have gone without their supper, one and all, than have kept their eyes from that sight, whose very dread made its fascination. Behind the pillars of the cloisters, at the windows of the upper corridors, in the dark corners of the quadrangle, stood they: and when the apparition showed itself, many a one among them recognized its face, all too unmistakable, to be that of the dead Lord of Pomeroy.

For, in spite of the night's vigil that Leolin, the priest, and Cox had kept, in spite of their earnest testimony, that no one was or could be in the west wing, and therefore that no trick was being played (as had been lately suggested), the shadowy form was seen afterwards just as frequently as before, and trouble and discomfort prevailed.

In the depth of the tribulation, a suggestion came from

Joan Pomeroy. Poor Joan, more full of anguish perhaps than any one else, and at the same time more religiously bound to the superstition, had never yet prevailed upon herself to look at the apparition. She sat in a front-room in the evening; the curtains of her bed-chamber were closely drawn before daylight had departed. But though Joan would not see, she heard all there was to hear; it shook her terribly, and undermined her peace.

From her came first the suggestion that Father Andrew should "lay" the ghost. That could not fail to be efficacious, as faithful Joan believed. The idea was eagerly seized upon by the abbey, and the priest was applied to.

At first Father Andrew positively refused to do anything of the kind. The priest had never given in to the theory: from him had emanated the suggestion that it might be a trick. However, for peace' sake; or, rather hoping that it might induce peace, he consented.

"I will do it," he said, "as you are all so urgent; but I protest against it. There is no ghost to lay, and never has been any."

Fifty tales, testifying to the presence of the ghost, were offered the father in refutation of this opinion; but they made no impression on him. One slight stumbling-block, existing in his mind, may have lain in the fact that he did not know how it was to be done. Never having been asked to lay a ghost before, he was to be excused if he felt a little uncertain in what manner to set about it.

At the appointed hour the west wing was thrown open, and the priest, arrayed in his sacred vestments, went in. He sprinkled the rooms with holy water as he passed through them, and in that of the west tower, the haunted room, he read a prayer for the repose of the spirit of Guy Pomeroy. No irreverence could lie in that, whether the spirit did wander or whether it did not.

Alas, nothing came of it! What *can* come of supplications offered up without heartfelt faith? And, in spite of the prayer and the holy water, the apparition wandered more than ever,

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE SEAT BY THE SEA.

It was the first Sunday in November; the day, a bright one, was fading into night. All Saints' Day and the day following it, All Souls' Day—or, as the French more expressively term it, the Day of the Dead—had been duly observed at Pomeroy, the one with grandeur, the other with appropriate gloom, according to Pomeroy usage. The weather since the middle of October had been beautiful: let it continue so another week, and they would this year have a true *été de St. Martin*.

Standing talking together at the door of the lodge, in the gathering twilight, were Charles Knox, of the Knoll, and James Knox, the agent. Mr. Knox chose to take a friendly notice of his poorer kinsman once in a way. He had walked over to see him this afternoon: had taken tea with him, and was now preparing to say good-night. But their discourse had turned upon old family reminiscences; and Charles Knox lingered yet.

It might be said that night had fairly set in when he shook hands and finally took his departure. He was a little man, of impetuous movements and temper, good-hearted and honest, his face chronically red, his nose sharp. Mrs. Pomeroy's imperious rejection of him had not affected his heart; since then he had wooed and won a charming girl, who had now just presented him with a son and heir.

Considering that there was no moon, the night was remarkably light. Charles Knox noted the fact as he strolled leisurely through the village. A white haze seemed to pervade the atmosphere and to light up the sea: he could see the water as plainly as though it were only twilight. He was in no particular hurry to get home, and looked leisurely about him.

Leaving Pomeroy Abbey to the left, he continued the

gentle ascent of the high-road; in twenty minutes, or so, it would take him to his own gates. If he chose to strike off to the left beyond the abbey gardens, and pursue the field way, he would shorten his route by some five minutes. Mr. KNOX was deliberating within himself in an indifferent sort of way, whether he should do this, when a blue flame, suddenly darting up from a ship at sea, turned the current of his thoughts.

"What does the vessel want?" he exclaimed to himself, standing still to gaze. "Or, are the sailors simply amusing themselves?"

Turning off the road, he descended some steps cut in the rock and gained the beach. This small strip of beach, in length but a few yards, belonged exclusively to the Pomeroy's, and was called the abbey beach; other people did not intrude upon it. There the young Pomeroy's used to moor their pleasure-boats; from there, when lads, they would jump into the sea and bathe. The rocks jutted out in a point at each end, and partially enclosed it: at the end nearest the village a natural seat in the rocks was formed. Mr. Knox remembered this seat, and went towards it, intending to take up his station there for a short time, and watch. If the ship was in distress, he might be able to give the alarm.

But, when half-way to the seat, he suddenly halted. It was occupied. Some man sat there. A man who, disturbed no doubt by his footsteps, turned his head and face sharply round to scan the intruder. And when the eyes of Knox of the Knoll rested on that face, his heart gave a wild leap within him.

• "It is Rupert Pomeroy!" gasped he.

Drawing up a short dark cloak, that seemed to have been allowed to fall from his shoulders as he sat, drawing down his cap, until it concealed his face, the poor exile and wanderer leaped up the rocks behind him: a short but dangerous ascent.

"Rupert! Rupert!" cried Charles Knox in a loud whisper. "Wait. I am your friend—Knox of the Knoll. I'll do what I can for you."

• But the only answer to this was, the continued ascent of

Rupert, and the muffled sound of a human voice, that seemed to come from the air above. "Back, Knox; back."

Mr. Knox had not scaled those rocks since he was a boy. He did not care to try the feat now, for he knew how easy it would be to slip backwards: he ran to the steps and hastened up them. The tall, thin, cloaked figure was striding across the road and the greensward beyond it, making direct for the abbey gardens. Charles Knox strode after him.

But to no purpose. A small door stood here in the midst of the wall. The fugitive gained it, opened it, and disappeared within the gardens. Mr. Knox ran up at the utmost speed of his little legs, to find the door locked against him.

"What a dreadful thing!" he exclaimed: meaning of course that Rupert should be at Pomeroy. "What a frightful hazard!"

Standing as one bewildered, he had still his hand on the door when some one else came in view. Norris the surgeon: who had, in fact, been to the Knoll to pay his evening visit to Mrs. Knox. The doctor recognized him and left the road to cross the greensward. Mr. Knox crossed it also, and met him half-way.

"I was never so startled in all my life," cried Knox; and in the confusion and perplexity of the moment, he disclosed to the doctor what had just happened. Mr. Norris, an equable man at all times and seasons, took the news calmly.

"I suspected Rupert must be here," was his reply. "Some people affirm that they have seen him."

"But what culpable imprudence!" exclaimed Mr. Knox. "I think I had better tell Leolin Pomeroy."

He walked by the doctor's side to the abbey. They both entered it together. The one to pay a professional visit to Lady Anna; the other to seek an interview with her husband.

Leolin was sitting at the open window, without lights, when Mr. Knox was shown in. He had seen the blue light thrown up from the ship, and was watching for it again. Charles Knox sat down; and, in low, covert tones, imparted to Leolin what had taken place.

Every pulse within him coursing on to fever heat, every wild apprehension that imagination could suggest rising up in his heart, Leolin in his fear and distress yet made a feint of doubting the words. "It could not be," he breathed: "your eyesight must have deceived you."

"Could not be!" retorted peppery Mr. Knox. "Do you think I have forgotten your brother? I say that it was Rupert; Rupert himself. And I have come here to tell you."

Not long did Leolin hold out. His heart was sinking with despair. Claspings the friendly hands that were so willing to meet his, he confessed that the very thing he had been dreading for two or three weeks past was this—that Rupert was lying concealed at Pomeroy.

"We must find him—and get him away from it," cried Charles Knox. "I'll stand by you; I'll do what I can for him. People would say it is compounding a—felony, I expect; but I'd risk that for Rupert. He was a good friend of mine once, poor fellow. I always liked him. Who could help liking him? Ah, never shall I forget that last dinner he had with me. My aunt, Lady Millichip, was staying at the Knoll—you know her; silly old coquette—going on and flirting, as she did, with Rupert at the table. When he got up in the middle of dinner, saying that he was obliged to leave for a short time, but would come back again and finish the evening, she turned crusty. An hour or two later we heard the dreadful news: that a quarrel had taken place between him and his brother, and that Guy was dead."

"It was not with you he took refuge at that time, was it?" exclaimed Leolin, the thought suggesting itself.

"Certainly not. He never came to the Knoll again. It would not have been safe if he had come. No: from the time he left my dinner-table that night, I never saw him until now."

"Through the door into the garden?" mused Leolin. "But the gardeners keep that door locked."

"He must have a key that opens it."

"And what can he want in the gardens—and where can he be hiding?"

"Had we not better go there?" suggested Charles Knox.

Downstairs at once went they, passed along the cloisters, and thence to the gardens by the proper entrance. The ship and her blue lights were forgotten now. Hither and thither through the grounds they stole. Once or twice, Leolin called out his brother's name in a half-whisper—"Rupert! Rupert!"

All in vain. The gardens were, or appeared to be, deserted. Of course there was every opportunity for Rupert, if indeed he was still in them, to escape detection; to make his silent way to one part whilst they were searching another. The small door in front of the sea was locked: no sign existed of any one's having passed its portals. At the opposite end of the garden, near the aviary, was a tool-house, and in this there was another door of exit—which they found locked—as was usual. Of course Rupert could have left the garden by this door, provided he had a key to it—as it appeared he had to the other. Where was he?—where could he be? At last, when something like an hour-and-a-half had elapsed, they had to give up the quest as fruitless.

"Whatever happens, rely upon me," whispered Charles Knox, pressing Leolin's hand in parting.

He hastened home to his wife—who probably was wondering whether he had run away from her. And Leolin sat on at the open window again, gazing at the sea; too uneasy to go to bed, too sick at heart to remember how the night was passing. With Guy hovering about in the spirit, and Rupert in the body, Leolin knew not what to be at, what quarter to turn to for comfort.

Monday dawned. A bright sunshiny morning. In front of the abbey gateway, Miss Mary Pomeroy's pony, saddled and bridled, was being led about; Jeffs, already mounted, waited in the rear. The usual attendant on Miss Mary during her rides was an elderly man named Lamp, who had been one of the grooms in the old lord's time. The supernatural atmosphere just now pervading the abbey had so upset Lamp as to make him ill: at least, he put his indisposition down to that score, and had obtained leave of absence. So Jeffs had been borrowed, as the young lady

once expressed it to Lady Anna, for temporary attendance on her.

For once Mrs. Pomeroy had taken advice. Herself impressed with the conviction that the abbey in its present state of excitement was not a desirable residence for her little daughter, she had lost no time in placing Mary at the convent. In spite of the child's opposition, Mrs. Pomeroy carried her point: and a fortnight ago Mary had entered. But some concession had to be made: without it, perhaps, the fate of the battle would have been doubtful, for Mrs. Pomeroy had to do with a will stronger by nature than her own. She promised the child that she should always come home from Saturday to Monday; that is, Mary was to be a weekly boarder. Upon this Mary yielded, and went with a tolerably good grace.

On the previous Monday morning, a week ago, she had made no objection to going back. This morning they were waiting for her to come out, a groom holding the pony, Jeffs ready to escort her.

Presently the young lady appeared in an ordinary walking dress and straw hat; a grey skirt being fastened on for riding. Rupert Pomeroy was with her--looking very tall for his eleven years, slender, gentlemanly, beautiful as ever--and Mademoiselle de Garonne. Mademoiselle retained her post at the abbey, and looked after Mary during her sojourn in it. Bridget, and others of the servants, came running out to see the child depart: they were all very fond of her, though she tyrannized over them.

Rupert put her on her pony. When seated, she remained still, talking with one and another.

"And mind, Miss Mary," cried Bridget, "that you bring home next Saturday the beautiful strip of embroidery you have begun. We want to see it."

"I don't know that I shall. When a good piece of it is finished then I may. There's only a flower and a scallop done yet. And they are going to pick that out, because it's done badly. Sister Agnes said so."

"My dear," interposed mademoiselle, "shall you not be late?"

"Very likely. Jeffs," coolly added the young lady, turning her head to the coachman, "I am not going back to the convent this morning. I shall take a ride instead."

Mademoiselle de Garonne, Bridget, the maids, old Jeffs himself, all lifted their hands and voices in reproof of the heresy. Mrs. Pomeroy, standing at an open upper window to see Mary start, heard, and came down.

"You will go straight to the convent, Mary," she said, "turning neither to the right nor the left. Jeffs, do you hear? Miss Mary must go straight back."

"It is not as Jeffs pleases, mamma; it is as I please."

"It is as I please," corrected Mrs. Pomeroy. "You are late now. It will be ten o'clock before you get there."

"It is a beautiful morning; I should like a ride, and I shall take it, mamma. I mean to pay a visit to grand-mamma, and to Naomi Rex. If I feel inclined, I shall ride about all day, and get to the convent at bed-time."

With perfect calmness, but with the utmost display of will, the young lady asserted this. Mrs. Pomeroy broke out into scolding, her voice raised more than it need have been. In the midst of it Leolin appeared.

"What is the disturbance?" he asked. "Is anything amiss, Mrs. Pomeroy? Won't go back to school properly? I am surprised at you, Mary."

"I shall go back when I please, Uncle Leolin. And if it were not that I like being with the little girls there, I should not go back at all. Papa did what pleased him always, and I shall do what pleases me."

"And were I your papa, my young lady, I should carry you back to the convent myself, and not let you see the outside of it for six months."

"But you are not my papa; you are only Uncle Leolin," retorted Mary, keeping herself and her temper perfectly under command.

"Mary, I insist upon your riding off at once," interposed her mother. "There. Good-bye. Be a good child, and present my regards to the ladies."

Apparently, Mary prepared to obey, for she urged the

pony a few steps forward. Then she halted again, opposite Rupert.

"I shall not say good-bye to you, Rupert: and I don't know that I shall speak to you when I next come home. You are very wicked this morning. You might have come with me if you would. Good-bye, mamma. Good-bye, all. I am off now, Jeffs. To grandmamma's first."

And the young lady, riding off at a canter, deliberately took the road to Mrs. Wyldc's, not as much as looking at that which led to the convent.

"Rupert, run!" gasped Mrs. Pomeroy in half-angry, half-despairing accents, for how to manage this wilful child she knew not. "Run round to the stables, get on your pony as quickly as you can, and ride after her. You are the only one in the world who has influence with her, and can persuade her. Show her that she *must* go back to the convent at once. Make haste! What will the ladies think?"

Three minutes, and Rupert was galloping after her. They saw him join her: saw him put his hand on Mary's rein, and talk to her in his earnest way. He did not quite prevail; but the young rebel consented to a compromise. She paid the visit to her grandmamma at the White House, and then returned to the convent.

The group at the abbey gates, after watching as much of this as they could see, went indoors, Leolin alone remaining. His time seemed to hang on hand, his days passed listlessly. When a great trouble, especially if it be accompanied by suspense, lies within the breast, time seems to move on leaden wings. Leolin had no heart for anything. Shooting, boating, all sports had lost their zest.

Take, for instance, this morning. There he stood, the sun shining on his good-looking face, utterly at a loss what to do with himself. Should he ride out as the children had just done; should he stroll through the village; should he go off and sit on the rocks and gaze at the monotonous sea, as his unwelcome brother Rupert had sat the previous night, and strive for the five hundredth time to think out his perplexities? Should he take his gun, and-----"

"Good-morning, Mr. Pomeroy."

"Ah, good-morning," answered Leolin, wheeling round to see James Knox, the agent, who was coming up to his daily business. "A fine day."

"Very," said James Knox. :

Purely from want of something to do, Leolin turned and walked by his side to the business chamber. James Knox, who was very busy just then with the Michaelmas rents, privately wished Leolin and his desultory chat elsewhere. Something was said about the flourishing state of the revenues, and the increased income that must accrue to the Lady of Pomeroy; it reminded Leolin of Major Barkley, and he mentioned his name.

"I was talking to him on Saturday," carelessly replied the agent: and Leolin started at the words.

"Talking to him on Saturday. To Barkley? Where is he, then?"

"He is staying at Owlstone; but I fancy he is coming here on a visit to the lady. He was here on Saturday. She brought him into this room and introduced me to him."

"Seems to make himself at home!" exclaimed Leolin, his ire excited at the bare mention of the man: and he remembered that on Saturday he had, for a wonder, taken a whole day's shooting, thereby escaping the sight of Major Barkley and the knowledge of his visit.

"Quite so," observed Knox, innocently acquiescing in the remark. "He went to see old Jerome during the afternoon."

"What did he want with Jerome?" cried Leolin, haughtily.

"Nothing particular, I suppose. I saw him coming out of the keep."

Whether rightly or wrongly, as circumstances might hereafter decide, Leolin was cherishing a strong prejudice against this Major Barkley. If it pleased Sybilla to have him at the abbey and make much of him, no one had the power to say her nay; but what right had the fellow to intrude himself into the keep? Jerome was the servant of the Pomeroy's—he had never been Sybilla's. No underhand work should go on, if he, Leolin, could prevent it.

Quitting the room at once, Leolin stalked round to the keep, and rang a peal on the bell that might have startled old Jerome if he heard it. It was to be inferred that he did not hear it, as it remained unanswered. Leolin rang on.

"He *must* be out, I suppose. Where can he have gone to at this early hour?"

As the words left Leolin's lips and he was about to give it up, the door was slowly opened by Jerome. Scared and pale, the old man stood staring, very much as though Leolin had been the ghost come round from the haunted room.

"What do you mean, Jerome, by keeping me ringing like this? Are you deaf, that you could not hear it?"

"I was upstairs, sir," was Jerome's tremulous answer, his shaking hands drawing forth a chair for his master. "I hope you'll please to pardon me, Mr. Leolin. I had gone up to look for a last winter's coat that I can't put my hands on; and I thought nothing more but that it was the baker's boy with my loaf."

"Did you have a visit from a Major Barkley on Saturday?" began Leolin.

"Oh, sir! Why do you ask that?"

"*Why do I ask that?*" retorted Leolin; suspicious, he knew not of what, cropping up in his mind. "I have a right to ask it; and to have it answered. What did Major Barkley want with you?"

"He wanted nothing with me, sir; nothing that could anger you. The gentleman was good enough to call and ask how I was, just as he did the other times he has stayed here. He heard of old Jerome from Mr. George, sir; and he, being a kindly gentleman, came to tell me so; and he has slipped a crown piece into my hand each time."

Leolin knitted his brow: had he been making a mountain of a molehill? The old man was shaking and shivering.

"What are you trembling at, Jerome?"

"Trembling, sir? I'm old now, Mr. Leolin, and these stories that are being told about the abbey, and what's seen there, upset me. Never a ring sharper than ordinary comes to the door, but it puts me in a twitter."

"You have not got my brother concealed here in the keep, have you?" cried Leolin, after a pause. And Jerome stared at the questioner like a dazed man, never answering.

"I speak of poor Rupert," explained Leolin. "Is he here?"

"The good Lord forbid!" ejaculated Jerome, crossing himself; and his terrified dismay at the bare idea was too genuine not to assure Leolin, had he needed assurance, that wheresoever Rupert might be sheltering himself, it was not at the keep. Though indeed he had only spoken idly, the remark of Mr. Hildyard chancing to occur to him.

"Look here, Jerome—you are a faithful adherent of the Pomeroy, and I will mention to you a fear which has been haunting me. This apparition—that the servants talk of; that is scaring their wits away—I hold a theory that it may be Rupert."

Jerome, trembling still, looked all at sea. He evidently failed to comprehend.

"What I think, what I have reason to fear is, that Rupert has found his way back here in secret; that it is he himself they are taking for a ghost in the west tower."

"Mercy be good to us," uttered Jerome. "Mr. Rupert's ghost, sir?"

"His ghost, no! Himself. He is not dead. Driven to bay, he may have sought shelter in the west tower."

"Ah, no, Mr. Leolin," said the old man mournfully, fully understanding now. "It is not, it cannot be Mr. Rupert. It's the Lord of Pomeroy, sir: he has never been able to lie quiet in his grave. And, sir, I think it is nothing short of presumptuous heresy for the servants, and others, to go ferreting into that west tower. Better let it be. Spirits that come again should not be tampered with."

To argue on the subject of supernatural appearances with Jerome would have been a hopeless task; and Leolin took his departure.

A little more time passed on, uncomfortably. Guy Pomeroy was seen now and again; rumours arose that Rupert was also. The abbey might be said to exist in a state of continual dread even Leolin, though he ridiculed

the superstitious fears with his lips, hardly knew whether he was not becoming a half convert to them in his heart. Continual dropping, we are told, will wear away a stone.

Major Barkley still made Owlstone his head-quarters, though why he should do so Leolin could not conceive. Unless it was to enjoy the society of the Lady of Pomeroiy, for he made occasional trips over, staying at the abbey for two or three days together. Leolin avoided him as much as he decently could, and yet keep up some show of civility, urging his wife's delicate health as a plea for refusing most of Sybilla's invitations to join them at dinner. Joan was sometimes at the abbey, sometimes at the convent. The abbey tried her nerves, and she was often glad to run away from it.

Matters were in this state when a terrible incident occurred. One afternoon Joan and Leolin went to call upon some friends who lived near, and sat with them until dark. Dark, however, it was not: for the moon, once more high in the sky, gave her light fitfully; now hiding herself under a cloud, now shining out, clear and brilliant. Their nearest way back lay across the fields, past the chapel. Under the yew hedge that skirted the small graveyard they met Father Andrew. He was going home, but turned to walk with them.

"I have just been with Mrs. Pomeroiy," the priest observed. "My opinion is, that if we cannot get this wretched belief in the apparition out of her mind, it will kill her. She protests to me that she saw it more plainly last night than she has done at all, except the first time in the haunted chamber."

"She told me of it this morning," sighed Joan. "She says that strange, pale light, that they talk of, was shining about it; that it stood at the window for two or three minutes, and then seemed to sink through the floor."

"It is so truly absurd!" exclaimed Father Andrew, more irascibly than the good-natured priest often spoke. "Mrs. Pomeroiy has a mania upon her; it will go on to insanity, if she does not take care."

"It is no mania, father," said Joan.

The priest took her quickly up. "Have you seen the ghost?"

"No. I have kept myself from the sight. I trust I never shall see it."

"Neither has any one seen it, excepting Mrs. Pomeroy and the servants. We all know what to understand when servants profess such a belief: and Mrs. Pomeroy, as I say, has a mania upon her."

"You forget Lady Anna—and Norris," interposed Leolin. He was in a fractious mood, no extraordinary case lately; to contradict even the father seemed a relief to him.

"Their eyes must have deceived them; I insist upon it that they must. And as to your family—why, you know how superstitious you have all been from your cradles."

"Some of us, you should say."

"You have all a taint of it, every one of you. It would not surprise me any morning to find you coming to me with a tale that you had seen it."

"Possibly the day may dawn, father, when you will see it and believe in it," returned Joan.

The father took a solacing pinch of snuff. "When I do see it, I'll believe in it," quoth he; "not before."

"We shall never agree upon this subject, father."

"Never, my daughter. So we will drop it, and I'll say good-evening."

"You may as well come on and dine with me," said Leolin to him.

"Thank you; I don't care if I do," replied the ever-sociable priest, who liked only one thing better than a good chat, and that was a good dinner. "I should find but a poor supper at home, I expect. This is clearing day; and Marget says cooking interferes with cleaning."

"I should not put up with Marget's whims," said Leolin.

"I sometimes tell her I won't. But she's too old to be sent adrift, poor creature. Don't believe she is far short of eighty."

A temporary silence ensued. In passing the keep, the moon, sailing majestically from behind a cloud, threw her light upon them; and upon—what?

Right in front of them, in the path they must tread, stood the spirit of Guy, Lord of Pomeroy. As if to confute the disbelief of the priest, there it was, as ghostly, as high, as shadowy as it had ever appeared, its dull eyes fixed upon them in reproach, and its hare-lip conspicuous on its livid face.

The priest, a little in advance, stepped back, crossed himself, and began mechanically a paternoster; Joan, with a suppressed wail of terror and pain, turned and clung to Leolin. The next moment, when they looked up, it had vanished. Vanished whither? In truth they knew not. The massive stone walls of the keep, the mother earth: which—what had received it?

“Father Andrew!” uttered Leolin, surprised for the moment into solemnity, “did you see it?”

“Oh, mercy be good to us, yes!” confessed the priest, wiping his brow. “That was Guy Pomeroy. No mistake about it.”

“Can the poor spirit have been wandering all these nine years without cessation?” bewailed Joan, in her agony of distress. “Oh, Father Andrew! if it could only be laid to rest!”

CHAPTER XV.

TROUBLE AND TERROR.

STRANGE commotion was in the Abbey of Pomeroy. A young child was dying. Children die every day, are mourned and forgotten: but the circumstances attending this child's anticipated death were deemed to be strange. It was the third infant of Lady Anna Pomeroy's that had thus been prematurely cut off, and all unexpectedly. The other two had been girls; this was a boy, little Hugh, and valued accordingly: a strong, beautiful child, a few months old. Some slight ailment, common to infancy, had attacked

him a week ago; he was thought to be recovering; all day long he had seemed as well as possible; and now, when evening had set in, he was suddenly seized with convulsions. Precisely had it been so with the two former children, now mouldering in the Pomeroy vaults: would this child follow them?

So well had he seemed this very morning: almost convalescent. Leolin Pomeroy had stood over the cradle laughing and talking, as he discussed with his wife some joyful news. The dream of his later life appeared to be close upon fruition. That for which Leolin had been working for years in semi-secrecy: now all but grasping success, now falling into despair at the many crosses and delays that for ever threw him back: had never looked so bright, so certain, as now. For a messenger had travelled direct to Pomeroy from the Court of Rome, bringing glad tidings to Leolin.

He needed them. He needed some ray of sunshine to temper the gloom and horror in which the abbey was steeped. That atmosphere of superstition, which had for some two months reigned within it, for it was now December, had not cleared itself one whit. Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, so long dead, haunted it, and would be seen at times by the affrighted inhabitants.

Even Leolin did not quite know what to make of it. Whilst ridiculing the fears which he never ceased to call foolish, he had, himself, seen the apparition; and Guy's was a face that could not be mistaken. Mrs. Pomeroy was growing absolutely ill with the dread. Joan passed her days in a continual horror. The Lady of Pomeroy maintained, as ever, her assertion that they were all mistaken, shook her head in kindly ridicule at their fears, kept plenty of lights burning in the abbey, and was never tired of going about it with her cheering presence and words. Major Barkley, the close friend of her late husband, still remained on his visit to her: Leolin haughtily wondered what he wanted there, and whether he meant to stay on for ever.

This brings us to the last day of the child's life. It was the first day of the week, - Monday. Another week set in of

unhappy discomfort, of ghostly fears! another week of intolerable suspense to Leolin, as to whether his cherished scheme would prosper eventually, or perish. One and twenty days to-day since a word, good or bad, had reached him from Rome. Leolin took his breakfast in moody silence. The star of Pomeroy did not seem to be in the ascendant.

But how one short hour may change things! Barely had Leolin quitted the breakfast-room for the library, when—with all the state and ceremony observed on important occasions at Pomeroy—a messenger direct from Rome was shown in: an Italian gentleman, charged to confer with Leolin.

The conference lasted two hours and a half. And then Leolin, snatching a moment whilst refreshments were being served, made his way to his wife, his mien radiant, his manner genial as it used to be before these troubles of later years set in. Anna—who had recovered from the fever, but was not yet strong—stood over her baby, as he lay in his cradle, laughing and crowing.

“If he keeps as well as this, he shall go out to-morrow, Christine,” she observed joyfully to the nurse. “The weather is still mild.” But at this moment Leolin walked in, and motioned the nurse away.

“At last, Anna!” he exclaimed. “I shall soon once more hail you as Lady of Pomeroy.”

“Have they dissolved the marriage, then?” returned Anna, in a quiet voice, as though the news were a matter of indifference to her.

“No; and I am not sure that they will dissolve it. Signor Gallino has come here all the way from Rome to confer with me. Gallino says the marriage will have to stand good, once and for all. But the Vatican will refuse to recognize any as Lord of Pomeroy save my brother Rupert, the poor wanderer; and it will recognize me as lord during Rupert’s absence.”

“Has the Court of Rome pronounced this?”

“It is on the eve of doing so.”

“But—the English law?” debated Anna, that important

point striking her at once. "If Sybilla should refuse to yield obedience to this—should call the law to her aid?"

"Would she dare to do it, do you imagine?—dare to oppose any decree pronounced by Rome? You must know she would not, Anna. Whatever may be Sybilla's shortcomings in other respects, she is faithful and obedient to her church. Rupert can never return, openly, at least; so I reign for life."

"Leolin, darling, it is not just. Do not think of it. Rupert is the heir, failing the other Rupert; let him reign. How can we be happier than we are?" added Anna, looking up with a smile. "Baby is almost well: what more need we care for?"

Leolin Pomeroy bent over the cradle, and dropped the subject. He had long known how useless it was to impress these, his own notions on his wife. The baby smiled at him, and closed his little fist round the forefinger Leolin placed within it. "You young Turk! you'd like to keep me a prisoner, would you? He will be quite well in a day or two, Anna."

"Oh, quite, Leolin," she continued, in an impassioned whisper. "I think if this child had followed the other two, I should almost have died."

Leolin brought his face up from his boy's and bent it on his wife's. "Forget his danger, Anna, love, he is well again; and therefore the more reason exists for my assuming my right. Our child must succeed me in it."

Anna shook her head. "There may be logic in what you say, Leolin, but there certainly is not reason. Your brother Rupert is older than you; and his life, I should fancy, is not likely to be very much prolonged—think what it must be for him! At his death the young Rupert must be Lord of Pomeroy without dispute."

"We don't know that," said Leolin, significantly. "Let me once get into power here—it will be strange if I cannot make things turn out as I will. Will you come in to luncheon, and see Gallino?"

"I think not, Leolin. I do not know him; and I hardly care to leave baby."

Leolin went back to his guest. And, when the hasty meal was over, drove him to Owlstone to catch a London train. Signor Gallino had come charged with other missions from Rome, as well as that to Leolin.

Leolin returned home just in time to dress for dinner. In the drawing-room he found his wife, standing over the fire. Her face was a subdued face this evening; it was generally so now; her eyes carried with them a faint suspicion of recent tears. Leolin could but notice this demeanour: it contrasted so strongly with his own joyous mood.

"You look sombre as your gown, Anna," said he, laughingly, alluding to the black silk she was wearing; and since her illness she had not yet ventured on dresses made in the fashion for evening. "What's amiss? Baby is not worse, is he?"

"Nothing is amiss, Leolin; nothing," she gently answered, slipping her hand into his; "and baby has been quite well all day, and as good as gold. I don't feel strong myself, that is all; and I began thinking, as I sat between the lights, that—perhaps—I should never be strong again. And so——"

"And so you made a goose of yourself," put in Leolin, drawing her to him. "But you know you have promised me, times and again, not to indulge in these low spirits, Anna."

"I cannot always help it," she sighed. "And, what with one thing and another, the abbey, as you know, is very dreary just now."

• "I wish I could take you out of it!" he impulsively exclaimed. "I would, but for one thing."

"What is that thing?"

"That I cannot well absent myself from it."

"Dinner, my lady," announced one of the servants, throwing wide the door.

Leolin took his wife's hand, led her in, and they sat down to table. He was gay and talkative. His mood this evening was really a joyous one: moreover he generally deemed it well to show himself tolerably so before his depressed and frightened servants. The last course was on the table when

Christine, the nurse, came swiftly into the room without any ceremony whatever, her eyes wild. The baby was in convulsions.

With a stifled cry, Anna flew to the chamber. Leolin followed. It was too true. The child's life was ebbing fast.

All was now confusion. One attendant ran hither, another thither; Mr. Norris came upon the wings of the wind, Father Andrew was sent for. Leolin drew his weeping wife away from the scene to a quieter chamber; he essayed to speak a few soothing words. Hardly listening to their import, Anna lifted her white face to her husband from the crimson velvet chair where he had seated her. Her countenance was full of deep meaning, of dread; she spoke in a whisper, and shivered as she sat. A fear crossed him that the ague was coming back to her.

"There is some strange fate upon us, Leolin, and you provoke it. Three times have you been on the point, or seemed to be, of dispossessing that little boy, Sybilla's child, and each time our child's life has paid for it. When the news first came, three years ago, that Rome would aid you to dispossess the young lord, our baby sickened and died ere the day was over. She had been very well until then. Again, when news came the second time that Rome would certainly aid you to dispossess the boy, our second baby died. Now you have had tidings to-day to the same effect, and this, our last darling, is dying. And yet--Leolin!--you are not a whit nearer your ambition than you were, for the young Rupert is the lord still."

Sheer surprise had kept Leolin silent. Was his wife losing her senses?—had trouble scared them away? He did not feel sure it was not so.

"I am astonished at you, Anna!" he cried. "At any other moment, I should reprove you. They have been mere ordinary coincidences, such as occur in every one's life. Put away fancies so ridiculous, my dearest."

"I wish I could put away my baby's danger," she returned, in wailing tones. "Oh, Leolin! I tell you I think I shall go with him, if he is to die. Heaven is displeased;

it is assuredly working against us. No, do not keep me; pray do not keep me! Let me see the last of him!"

What could Leolin do, in answer to this piteous appeal, but let her return to the sick-chamber? He looked in at the door himself, but that was all. Men do not like such scenes; and, what with doctor and servants, there was no room for him. He was ardently attached to the child, and he felt that he would almost give his own life to save that frail one flitting away.

Putting on his hat he went down to the cloisters, and began slowly to pace them, his heart full of resentment and of bitterness. Resentment against what, or whom? He could not have told. It was an indisputable fact that each of the times which had seemed to bring his ambitious dreams especially near their fulfilment, had witnessed the death of one of his children: his eldest child first, then the second. And now, when for the third time the prospect of speedy realization was brought close to him, the third child was snitten. Was an ill fate pursuing him? Leolin, gathering up a thread of his wife's superstition, asked himself the question.

It was a cold night, the stars and the moon shining brightly. The mildness of the day had given place to a sharp frost—and it was always cold in those windy cloisters. Leolin wore no over-coat over his evening dress. He did not feel the need of it: his inward fever kept his blood warm. Another matter, which had troubled him lately, lay sharply on his mind to-night: and that was his wife's health. That she was weak in body, sorrowful in spirits, he could not fail to see. The words, spoken to him by Lady Essington, lay on his conscience more than he would have cared to tell. "It is distress of mind that worries Anna and makes her ill, and if you do not take care you will lose her." That the worry arose from his ambitious scheming he could not conceal from himself. If he lost his wife—and what effect this last child's death might have upon her, he shrank from contemplating—why then the world to him would be worthless.

"Leolin!"

So lost was he in these unwelcome thoughts, that he half started at the call. His sister had approached him, her dark face stern in its distress.

"Leolin, what is amiss with the child?"

"Convulsions," was the short reply. "He is dying."

"Dying! Is there no hope?" continued Joan, after a pause.

"I am sure there is none. I gathered it from Norris's face, and from a word he said to me."

"Alas, poor child! Poor Anna! The third infant! All of them so healthy and lovely; and yet—you cannot keep them!"

She had turned to pace the cloisters with him, and they walked side by side in silence. Presently Joan spoke again, in low tones.

"Why do you bring it upon yourself, Leolin?"

"*Bring it upon myself!*" echoed Leolin, defiantly. "Bring what?"

Joan laid her hand upon his arm soothingly, its very clasp bespeaking peace.

"You bring it upon yourself," she calmly repeated. "And, as it seems to me, things have now come to a pass when it would be worse than folly if we made pretence to shut our eyes to it. This plotting of yours, underlying all your hopes and actions, this perpetual working and striving to deprive Sybilla's child of his rights—why do you persist in it?"

"Because he is Sybilla's child," was the answer.

"He is George's. And George was Lord of Pomeroy. You cannot prevail against fate, Leolin; but fate can prevail against you. Have you forgotten the scene of Gaunt's death-bed?"

No answer.

"It is known abroad, Leolin. I speak of Gaunt's words. They might have proved to you either a blessing or a curse, as you took them up; hitherto you have made them the latter——"

"Joan!"

"Well, then, I will say provoked it. *As you deal by this*

child so may you prosper in your own children. They were Gaunt's words to you, Leolin. And how have you dealt by the child? and how have you prospered in your own children? Be wise in time; do away with your animosity and your plots against Rupert, and then perhaps you may be happy in children of your own."

"We are called a superstitious race, I know," sarcastically rejoined Leolin, "but I have yet to learn that importance can be attached to the prejudiced ravings of a dying man."

"What did Gaunt himself tell you?" quickly returned Joan—"to take heed how you despised the warning of a dying man. Leolin, there are things in earth that we cannot explain or account for; the solution of which we may not dream of in our philosophy. Why is it that the words of one, dying to this world, are so often found to be warnings, true as if they came from Heaven?—and that such has been the case, you cannot deny. Is it that, at that moment, the spirit has caught a portion of the divine knowledge it is hastening to, and can discern the future? I know not; you know not; but we both do know that these death-bed admonitions are sometimes strangely worked out; we both know that Gaunt's warning to you has so been."

"You are dreaming yourself, Joan."

"A good thing if we had all been dreaming of late years," was the reply. "You received fresh news from Rome this morning. Was it good?"

"Very good. The new cardinal is for me. They will not annul the marriage; that question is set at rest. But they will recognize Rupert the wanderer as the lord, and me as his sole representative."

"What end will that answer?" mournfully asked Joan. "Rupert will not live for ever; he cannot; and then the boy is chief of Pomeroy again: the true, reigning chief, to be dispossessed by none."

"That time may be far off, further than your life or mine, for we may never hear of Rupert's death. And until we do hear of it, I shall reign at Pomeroy."

"You never will, Leolin. I tell you that you cannot act

against fate. I see not how you will be prevented, but you will be; ay, in spite of what Rome may say or do, for fate has been working against you ever since Gaunt's death. Leolin, are the eyes of your understanding closed, that you cannot see it all? Often does my heart sink within me when I see how surely and cruelly the prediction is fulfilling itself."

"Joan, you were born a few centuries too late; you should have lived when astrologers and witches flourished."

"When the heir of Pomeroy goes forth a wife to win,
And the heir of Pomeroy goes forth in vain;
When the Lord of Pomeroy by a lie doth gain,
Then woe to the de Pomeroy's, twain and twain!"

Quite solemnly did Joan recite the lines aloud: that *she* put faith in them was very evident. Leolin's face was immovable.

"That poor Guy did win Alice by a lie, is too true, I fear," continued Joan. "And what has the result been?—what sad fate has it brought upon you all; you four brothers! But for the resentment that took possession of her when she discovered the fraud, even Alice, unstable though she was, would not have acted as she did: for I have learnt to believe that it was chiefly to spite Guy she allowed herself to meet Rupert. What has followed? Guy was murdered; Rupert is an exile; George is dead; and you—you are an unhappy and troubled man, Leolin. It has indeed been woe to you all, twain and twain."

"I cannot see what good it does to recall these things—or to discuss them."

Leolin's tone was hard; made so perhaps to conceal his pain. Joan's good feeling resented it. She had always been inclined to be dictatorial to her younger brothers.

"You must take your own course, Leolin." But your line of conduct does not tend to bring you honour."

"What conduct?"

"To the boy. You often insult him; and the account of it is whispered throughout the abbey."

"So he carries tales, does he?"

"No. But Mary does. You know what she is."

"I know that she has an insolent spirit, and that it ought to be taken out of her—for her own sake.

"She has Guy's spirit: but Mary has her good points. Mrs. Pomeroy has not repressed her will, as she ought to have done, and now it has obtained the mastery. Mary is a truthful child and the soul of honour."

"And is allowed to insult her elders with impunity. If—— Joan, what is the matter?"

They were then in front of the west tower. Joan had halted, and stood gazing upwards as if turned to stone. She clasped Leolin, and pointed to the window of the haunted room, the glass of which had never been repaired. "Leolin—see—there!"

Glaring down upon them with its ghastly face, Guy's face, was the figure that had lately been frightening the inmates of the abbey to sickness, almost to death. Never had it looked more shadowy, more ghostly, than it looked now.

Joan bowed her head, and trembled. The figure vanished. And, before a word had been spoken by either brother or sister, Mrs. Pomeroy came swiftly up.

"Leolin, I can bear it no longer," she sobbed forth, every pulse within her quivering with horror. "It is killing me. Something must be done; something devised. Theresa said you and Joan were walking here, so I came to you."

"Devised?" repeated Leolin.

"I would rather die than bear the life I am leading. It is in that room now—Guy. It has a dreadful look of reproach in its face."

"A reproach that tells home to her," thought Leolin, though he felt full of compassion for her distress. "Why do you sit where you can see the west rooms, Mrs. Pomeroy?"

"I must do so; I must. Some power that I cannot resist fascinates me to it. Let me be where I will—at Lady Anna's, at Sybilla's, out in the grounds, away in the village, praying in the chapel—as soon as dusk creeps on, I feel compelled to go where I can see the haunted rooms. It is as if a spell drew me; I cannot resist it: and there I sit and

watch—and watch—and shiver until the apparition shows itself, when I scream aloud for help, or I faint away. If it does not come, I am ill with expectancy, and watch through the live-long night, feverishly yearning for what I dread to see. It is killing me.”

“You should leave the abbey for a time,” said Leolin, deep pity in his tone.

“It would follow me.”

“Indeed I know not what remedy can be devised, save that of quitting the abbey. Your mother——”

Leolin’s voice died away. Christine was approaching them, her countenance mournful, her step heavy.

“She brings news of your child, Leolin,” whispered Joan.

“Well?” cried Leolin, turning to the woman, a pang seizing his heart.

“It is all over, sir. And my lady is lying senseless.”

Yes, the little child was dead. And the first thing to be done, as a preliminary to other forms and ceremonies, was to hoist the death-flag over the abbey gateway: the large melancholy flag, its white ground and black devices looking like nothing so much as a skull and cross-bones.

The flag was at the keep: to keep it in the abbey would have been a violation of the old Pomeroiy customs: consequently, as soon after the child was gone as the abbey could collect itself—which certainly was not very speedily, Jeffs and Markham, two of the elder servants, started to fetch the flag. They left the abbey together. On their way, in turning down the grassy hollow near the keep, they encountered a woman, coming along at full speed. No other than Bridget.

“Thee’rt back soon,” cried Jeffs, who was fond of adopting this familiar mode of speech.

“Ay,” answered Bridget. “Tooms is off to Owlstone, of all nights in the year; so, there being nobody to walk home with me, I thought, the sooner I came back the better. One doesn’t care to be about here at night, you know. Where are you two going?”

“To fetch the death flag. The young child’s gone.”

Bridget pushed back her bonnet. "I was afraid it would be so. I couldn't get him out of my head, poor little soul, and I felt as restless as could be. Lady Anna seems to have no luck with her children."

"The lord has been seen again to-night," continued Jeffs, solemnly crossing himself.

Bridget's voice dropped. "No!"

"It's true," said Jeffs. "He appeared at the tower window, ghastlier than ever; it is said that Mr. Leolin and Miss Joan both saw him there. Any way, they were in the cloisters at the time."

"He was here to-night," whispered Markham; "here, in this very hollow, not many minutes ago. Brill saw him, and came rushing into the abbey without any sense left."

Bridget shivered. Not daring to go on alone now, she turned back with the two men, walking between them. Suddenly, some person or thing was indistinctly seen swiftly passing along at a short distance. They supposed it to be the ghost. Bridget caught hold of her companions with a shriek; the men's hair rose on end.

How they dragged Bridget to the keep, and how they reached it, and thundered at its door till Jerome came, was best known to themselves.

"The saints be good to us!" shrieked Bridget. "The dead lord is in the hollow."

"I saw him with my own eyes this blessed night," wailed Jerome. "What have you all come here for?"

"The death-flag," answered Jeffs. "Lady Anna's child's gone."

• The old man lifted his hands. "How many more of the Pomeroy's are to go, ere death shall be satisfied?"

"One more," whispered Bridget; "Mr. Rupert: and then the poor, wandering spirit will be laid to rest. I have said it from the first."

They were returning home, the two men hearing between them the furled flag, for it was large and heavy, and Bridget walking with her head down, when an extraordinary incident occurred. Walking towards them in the cold winter's night, in her evening dress of black velvet, with its rich white lace,

her head bare, no covering on her neck and arms, came Mary Pomeroy.

"They are saying in the abbey, that papa is walking here to-night," said the young lady, 'as they stopped in their astonishment. "I have never seen him at the haunted windows. I want to see what he is like."

"She is out of her mind!" ejaculated Bridget, in a half-whisper.

"You are out of your mind for saying it," retorted Miss Mary. "Is it so strange that I should want to see papa, with all this commotion about him in the abbey? Brill came in just now, and said he had met the lord in the hollow; they had to give him some brandy, for he was prostrate with fright. And I have come out to see him. I will see him if he is to be seen."

"And you have no fear?" uttered Bridget, aghast.

"Fear!" returned Mary. "No. I possess the Pomeroy spirit, but not the Pomeroy superstition."

"You will catch your death, Miss Mary," returned Bridget again, whilst the two men stood uncovered in the child's presence. "Could you have put nothing on, if you must have come?"

"Of course I could not; had they known I was coming, they would have stopped me. Have you seen anything of papa?"

"What has come over her?" Bridget whispered to Jeffs: "it is against human nature to be so devoid of fear. We shall see nothing, Miss Mary," she added, aloud; "a looked-for ghost never comes."

As if to confute the woman's words, a sound, as of rustling garments, was heard, and a shadowy figure passed them. Its dull eyes were strained on the child, and the child's were strained on it—the spirit of her father. Mary Pomeroy, brave though she had professed herself to be, gave forth a cry, as she watched it gliding away in the moonlight. Bridget fell on her knees: the men, appalled, dropped the flag. To increase the solemnity of the scene, the death-bell tolled out at that moment from the abbey chapel, for the soul of the infant, just departed.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE KEEP.

THE Lady of Pomeroy sat in her drawing-room, when a servant entered and said that Jerome had come up from the keep and craved speech of her. Nearly a fortnight had elapsed since the burial of the infant, but Lady Anna Pomeroy's life had since then hung upon a thread; she was beginning now to recover, and all in the abbey rejoiced. There was another fact at which perhaps they rejoiced more -- the ghost had not been seen during these two weeks.

Jerome came in, his white hair flowing on his shoulders. Of late years he had acquired a sad look of care. "I would speak with the lady alone," he said, bending his head to Sybilla with reverence. And the servants closed the door.

"Madam," said Jerome, drawing near, "the closing scene is certainly at hand."

"You think so, Jerome?"

"Nay, it is no thought; it is all too sure."

"Major Barkley has feared the end was near. I will come at once, Jerome. And bring--whom?"

"None at present but Mr. Leolin. The lord asked, madam, but for you and for him."

"Jerome, you have had a trying time. If it be in my power to recompense your fidelity in any way--"

"The lady is very kind," interrupted Jerome. "I have seen the Pomeroy's dwindle away, one after another; the old lord first, and then his sons; all now are gone save Mr. Leolin: nothing is left for old Jerome but to hope soon to follow them."

"Nay, but I trust you will live many years, Jerome. These dark days will pass away, and there may be comfort in store for you yet. You would be faithful to my child?"

"Faithful to your child, madam? Ay, that would I. Is he not a Pomeroy? and was not his sire, Mr. George, with

his loving heart and merry spirit, dearer to me than some of the rest?"

Jerome backed out as he spoke, and Sybilla hastened to attire herself.

Leolin Pomeroy was in his wife's chamber. She lay on a sofa by the fire, well covered up; Leolin sat in front of the sofa, looking at her. How dear his wife was to him, this last illness, when he had nearly lost her, had shown; and if thankfulness had never pervaded his heart before, it filled its every crevice now. Decidedly Leolin was not having a good time of it, as the children say. In addition to the discomfort in the abbey, to the recent loss of his child, to the peril of his wife—in addition to all this, he was no nearer becoming chief of Pomeroy than he had been. Rather further off, in fact. For, within a day or two ill news had come to him from his old and firm friend the cardinal, to the effect that the hopes lately given to Leolin had again faded, as all previous hopes had faded, however near their realization they might have appeared to be, and his eminence began to think the matter would have to be given up.

Anna opened her eyes. "I did not know you were here, Leolin,"—holding out her hand. "Have you been here long?"

"Not very long, love," he answered, imprisoning the attenuated fingers between his own warm ones. "I think you look a little better, Anna. Do you feel so?" he added, anxiously.

Anna sighed. She felt her recovery was yet doubtful, in spite of Leolin's sanguine belief.

"When the winter has passed, I shall take you to a more genial climate," he resumed. "To the south of France, or to Italy—some one of those happy places."

"Oh, Leolin, if you would only go there for good!" she impulsively returned, tears of possible hope rising to her dim eyes. "If you would only leave this dreary abbey to itself, and forget your scheming, and let the little Rupert be at peace!"

"I know you have not liked the scheming—as you call it," he rejoined. "And your father has liked it less. He

has gone the length of saying that it worried you into that intermittent fever last autumn."

"Leolin," she murmured, her restless fingers nervously entwining themselves with his, "I think I will speak now—if I ever am to speak—and say what that scheming is to me. I think—I fear—that you will have to choose between it and me. It has taken such a sad hold upon me, it so distresses me and terrifies me, that I cannot get well. By day it saddens me, by night it torments me; and I seem to see that it will in the end be too much for me; that I shall not live."

"You think," answered Leolin, in a dreamy kind of way, "that I shall have to choose between it and you. That, if I am to keep you, I must abandon that."

"I cannot help it," she said, tears beginning to trickle slowly down her cheeks.

"Suppose I say that I will give it up? That my wife is dearer to me even than ambition?"

In her long-tried mind she thought this was too good to be real, and only kept the restless fingers still a moment that they might press his the closer. Leolin knelt down; he put his arm round her, his face very near to hers.

"I promise it you," he whispered. "It seems, as some of you have told me, that I cannot war with fate—and *that* appears to have arrayed itself against me for good and all. Henceforth, Anna, the strife shall cease: George's child shall be at peace, for me."

A faint cry, and Anna Pomeroy feebly drew his face down to hers.

A few minutes, and she seemed to have fallen into a tranquil sleep. Leolin stood by the fire, thinking of the promise he had just made, regretting it perhaps in his inmost heart, or, rather, its necessity, but certainly never intending to retract it. A servant appeared.

"The Lady of Pomeroy is here, sir. She wishes to see you."

"The Lady of Pomeroy! Here?"

"Yes, sir. She waits in the red room."

Visits from the lady to him were so rare that Leolin could only feel surprised as he went to her. Sybilla was attired for walking.

"I have had a summons to the keep, Leolin," she began, "and am come to ask you to accompany me. It is urgent."

"A summons to old Jerome," he returned, half sarcastically.

"Jerome brought it me. One is lying there, at the point of death, who would see both you and me."

Leolin felt somewhat staggered. "Lying at the keep!" he exclaimed. "Who is lying there?" And Sybilla dropped her voice to a whisper.

"The Lord of Pomeroy."

Leolin did not comprehend. He stared at her in amazement and confusion. Her countenance was sad, her manner solemn.

"He who has been an exile and wanderer for these nine years, Leolin; my brother-in-law and your brother. He is come back again, the true and only Lord of Pomeroy; and he is under Jerome's care at the keep—dying."

Leolin, waiting to mentally take in the facts, drew a deep breath. "Then we were not mistaken—we knew Rupert was here, but thought he must have gone again. Oh, how imprudent he is!" continued Leolin; "how can he have managed to escape detection?"

Altogether bewildered, he caught up his hat, and walked with Sybilla to the keep in the approaching twilight of the winter afternoon. Joan had gone to the convent for the day, but would be home later. In passing along the hollow ground, Leolin turned his head from side to side, looking perhaps for the apparition that had a trick of showing itself there. Sybilla interpreted it.

"Ah, Leolin, it is not here to-night. It will soon be laid to rest."

"With Rupert's death. That is what some of them have said, I hear. When did Rupert come?—and how can he have continued to conceal himself? It must be nearly two months since Knox saw him."

"Since Knox saw him?" echoed Sybilla.

"Knox of the Knoll. He found Rupert one night sitting on that seat on the beach."

"Speak of him as the Lord, Leolin. I told you, years ago, that none else had any right to the title." And Leolin shrugged his shoulders.

Jerome awaited them at the keep. Leading the way upstairs, he held the door of a chamber open for them to pass in. Leolin approached the bed: and, very much to his surprise, Major Barkley rose from a chair by its side and quitted the room. The windows were but narrow loopholes set in the deep wall, the daylight, besides, was growing dim, so that Leolin had to bend over the bed to discern the features of him who lay upon it.

"Rupert," he gently said, for one cannot speak angrily to a dying man, "Rupert—"

With a cry that sounded too wild in its astonishment and terror for any human cry, Leolin started back. He saw not the handsome Rupert lying there; but the white face, the already half-dulled eyes, and the imperfect, never-to-be-forgotten lips of Guy, Lord of Pomeroy.

Sybilla laid her gently-detaining hand on Leolin to reassure him. "It is indeed Guy," she whispered. "Guy himself; not Rupert."

Utterly confounded, startled, Leolin sank down on the chair from which Major Barkley had risen. In a moment such as this, even a strong man cannot at once collect himself. He was doubting whether he was in a dream: he was doubting what was true around him, what false; he was doubting whether that, on the bed, was Guy in the spirit, or Rupert in the body, with the semblance of Guy's face. In short, he knew not what *was*, what was not. Guy slowly turned on the pillow, and spoke—and the voice was Guy's, not Rupert's.

"Leolin, my brother!" But Leolin did not answer.

"Leolin, you will recognize Guy as the true Lord of Pomeroy," spoke Sybilla, perhaps mistaking the motive of his silence. "Whatever may have happened, he is such as long as he lives."

"Oh yes, yes!" mechanically replied Leolin. "Who would dispute *Guy's* right?"

"Well, Leolin, he has never forfeited it. It was Rupert who was killed, not Guy."

"I cannot understand," uttered Leolin, certain contradictions presenting themselves to his bewildered mind.

"In that scuffle in the haunted room, the one killed was Rupert," she resumed. "It was supposed to be the lord, and he was buried as the lord; but it was really Rupert. The lord escaped."

"Yes, I escaped," put in Guy, holding out to Leolin his feeble hand. "And I have since been a wanderer and an exile."

"I seem—to be all at sea," cried Leolin, affectionately clasping the hand between his strong palms, as he had but just now clasped his wife's. "*Rupert* killed!—and not yourself! Then why, Guy, did you go away?"

"Ah, it was a mistake," answered Guy, shaking his head; "I have had time to learn it since, and to repent of it. Better that I had stood my ground and declared all. It was too late to *come back* and do it. When passion clouds the judgment, one is apt to commit acts that can never be redeemed; to enter upon courses that cannot be retraced."

"And—you killed Rupert?"

"Yes. I thought I had good cause. In one sense of the word I had rich cause, for how dare a man, above all, a brother, come between husband and wife? Rupert was your brother and mine, Leolin, the son of our father and mother: nevertheless, I only gave him what he merited. I judged so then; I judge so now that I am on my dying bed. Let it pass."

"Yes, yes," acquiesced Leolin, the tears standing in his eyes. "Let it pass."

But the lord's excitement was rising, and he, despite his own words, pursued the topic. Sybilla went round the bed and wiped the dew-drops from his brow.

"Did any young wife of honour ever serve a husband as mine served me? And I loved her so! She was as the

very apple of my eye. Rupert must needs thrust himself between us. He must come down to the place and whisper tales to her and set her against me. Was it pleasant, think you, to hear that they met in their stolen walks almost daily; that they shut themselves into the keep to avoid my eyes? Those shameful facts became known to me. Then I went to John Gaunt and questioned him—your good father, Sybilla, and our ever faithful friend. I asked him why he harboured Rupert, who was showing himself to be my bitter enemy. Gaunt, in his straightforward way, avowed that Rupert had come to him unexpectedly, craving hospitality for a day or two, and that he had given him a hearty welcome, unaware of any reason why he should not do so. He added that Rupert had stayed longer than was expected, but that he believed he was going away that very evening. Will you give me that?" broke off Guy, pointing to a wine-glass that stood at hand; and Sybilla held it to his lips.

"I charged Gaunt not to say I had spoken to him," continued Guy. "And I watched. If I found him mooning after my wife again, I meant to give him the heartiest thrashing one man can give another. I watched; watched all that day and saw nothing: *she*, so far as I could make out, did not leave the house. At night, she excused herself from the dinner-table, and we sat down without her. At first I thought nothing; but, as the dinner went on, a notion crept into my mind that she might have stayed away to meet Rupert. Leaving my guests, I went to her rooms and could not find her; I went to the keep, but she was not there. Finally, suspicion and rage growing stronger and stronger with every minute, I came upon them both in the west tower. What sort of a moment do you suppose that was for me?"

Neither of his auditors answered. Sybilla had heard all this before.

"How I controlled myself, I know not, but I *did*; and I stood there, and watched, and listened. The moonlight streamed into the chamber; it was quite light. They were sitting side by side on the old velvet settle, *abusing me*.

For every taunting word that Rupert said of me, she had a worse. She was shedding tears, and openly lamenting that Rupert had to go away. He sat holding both her hands; presently he bent forward and kissed her. As I am a dying man, it is true, Leolin; kissed her on the cheek."

Leolin drew in his condemning lips.

"I nearly cried aloud in my agony of passion; I was feeling for my double-barrelled pistol—for I had it with me—when the clock in the quadrangle struck out ten. She started to the casement, saying something about the lateness of the hour, and Rupert followed her. I could not fire then; I meant to do it, Leolin; for I might have shot her instead of him, and in that moment, as I stood waiting, she turned and saw me. You know the rest."

"I—yes—I know that one was killed," hesitated Leolin, feeling that he very imperfectly knew anything. "We thought it was you."

"The first ball touched him not; before I could fire again, he had sprung upon me, and we had a deadly struggle. In this struggle the pistol went off by accident; not of intent, for I could not get my hand free to act; and to this moment I do not know whether it was any movement on my part or on his that caused it to go off. Rupert fell. I was mad with rage, blind with passion, and I assure you I have not too clear a recollection of what was done, or how it was done. You know what my fits of rage would be on occasion, Leolin: I was in the worst then that had ever fallen upon me; mad, I say to you; mad with jealousy, with my uncontrollable sense of wrong. I beat him on the face with the end of the pistol. I killed him—*killed* him."

A pause. There was a great deal yet that staggered Leolin. "Of course I can understand," he said, "how easy it was to mistake Rupert for you after death, as you were in so many respects so much alike, and the lower part of his face was unrecognizable; but he wore *your* clothes. And it was by the clothes people judged."

"Not my clothes, Leolin; he wore his own. It chanced that he was in evening-dress that night, as I was; he had

been coming at Knox's: and black suits, you know, are alike. His skirt, you are going to say, bore the name and coronet of Guy Pomeroy. True. But when he was last staying at the abbey our linen had got mixed, through some carelessness of the women; Rupert took some of mine with him to London, leaving some of his with me: and was it chance again?—that evening he was wearing mine. How did I know it, you ask. I did not know it: how could I have known it? I learnt all these details in the days that succeeded."

"But he wore your watch and chain, Guy: your signet ring; your——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Guy. "As I looked down on Rupert lying in the moonlight, knowing he was dead, a revulsion of feeling came over me. Not of sorrow for him; no; but of thought for the consequences. For the first time in my life, I went into a panic of fear. Would they hang me for this?—the thought, that they might do so, took possession of me. How could I escape, I asked myself; what could I do? There flashed through my brain a conviction—and no doubt a true one—that had it been Rupert to survive, he would have got away to safety much better than I; the Lord of Pomeroy was a man of more mark than his younger brother in more respects than one, and would be more minutely sought after. Then I thought—looking upon him—no one can tell now which of us it is, and it shall be supposed that it is I who died. Taking off my watch and chain, my ring, I put them upon him; emptying my pockets of their contents, I thrust them into his pockets, transferring what he had in his to mine. And then I made my escape."

"To—where?" asked Leolin, breathlessly.

"To the keep."

"But how did you get to the keep? How——"

"Stay, Leolin; you shall hear that later. I made my escape to the keep by the same way that I had come from it; Jerome came to me as speedily as he was able, knowing I must be there. Or, as he thought, Rupert, for he fully believed that the dead man he had seen, lying on the floor

of the west tower, was myself. Whilst the abbey was yet in its state of commotion, consequent on finding its lord lying dead in the haunted room, Jerome, I say, came to me. He brought me food that night; he brought me food and clothes during the few days that followed; and the evening of the funeral, *my* funeral, he quitted the abbey for good, and took up his abode here at the keep. A week or two later, when the pursuit after the escaped man—Ripert the murderer, as he was being called—was slackening, I ventured on my own escape, and got away.”

“Unaided?”

“No. Aided by John Gaunt.”

Leolin, glancing at Sybilla, looked the surprise he felt.

“Sitting over our fire here, the doors barred, the narrow windows darkened against intruders—though, in deed, little can look in save the stars in the sky—I and Jerome held frequent consultation——”

“Guy, Guy!” interrupted Leolin, with painful vehemence, “why did you not declare yourself then? It was not too late.”

“I thought it was. Then I should have had to stand my trial; there is no doubt of it; which I might not have had to do had I boldly declared myself at first. I did not relish a trial; I would not risk it. Besides I was still in that state of mind, between rage and misery, that I really did not care what became of me; and a life of travel in remote lands seemed more tolerable to me than one of stagnation, even though I could have reigned again undisturbed. Could I have taken her to my heart again? No, never.”

“I see. Go on, Guy.”

“Poor Jerome was worse than I; more timid. Distress at the turn things had taken, suspense, anxiety for my safety, seemed to be wearing him to a shadow. Equally afraid of my essaying to escape, and of my staying where I was, Jerome was not to be envied. ‘You can never attempt to go of yourself, sir,’ he would say to me, ‘and I am but a poor weak old man, and of what use can I be to you?’ ‘There is a man who could be of use,’ I answered one day, ‘and that’s John Gaunt; and I think I’ll trust him.’ We did

trust him, Leolin: that he would be faithful I knew well, whether or not he might be able or willing to aid me: and Jerome fetched Gaunt the same night to the keep. You may imagine his surprise."

"He did aid you?"

"With his whole energies. It was Gaunt who arranged everything: lent me money, took a passage for me in a ship going to China—for I chose that place first, of all others—and drove me away one evening at dusk in his gig, I attired in rough clothes, as an under-keeper, with a red woollen cravat bound about my throat and mouth."

Leolin drew a deep breath of relief. He seemed to see as in a picture the peril and the escape. "And you arrived safely there, Guy?"

"Safely there, to Canton; unmolested and unsuspected. I went as a steerage passenger; we thought it best; calling myself John Cook, and passing as a man who was seeking relatives that had settled in China. From Canton I embarked again, and made my way to George and his wife in India. You remember it, Sybilla?—the night I came, and how I startled you?"

"Ah, Guy, shall I ever forget it?" exclaimed Sybilla, in answer to the appeal. "When the news of the fatal affray here came out to us, that Guy had been killed by Rupert, and that Rupert had flown from justice, and could never succeed," she added to Leolin, "my husband had no scruple in assuming his right, as Lord of Pomeroy. George intended to sell out and come home; but, before he made his arrangements for doing so, the regiment was ordered to a remote, uncivilized district that was in a state of disturbance, where we found no proper accommodation of any kind. Nevertheless, I was glad of the change for myself and the two children—we had two then. One evening when Captain Barkley, as he was then, was sitting with us in our confined quarters, Moore entered, and told George that a man wished to see him—wished it very particularly. 'Who is he, and what is his name?' said George; so Moore went back to ask the name, and brought word it was John Cook. We had been inquiring for a man to do work about the house,

and concluded it was one come after the place. I said I would go and see what he was like—as he was to be my servant more than George's. There he stood in the twilight; *Rupert*, as I thought at first. I was not in very strong health then, and I sank down on a chair, half fainting at his imprudence, and wondering whether we should be able to shield him. 'How could you come here, Rupert?—how shall we succeed in concealing you?' I whispered. 'It is not Rupert?' he answered, as he unwound the handkerchief from his chin, and I knew the voice for Guy's and saw the face. A feeling of bewilderment came over me. I screamed, and it brought in George and Captain Barkley."

"Go on; tell him all," said Guy.

"We took him into the sitting-room," she resumed to Leolin, "and there Guy told his tale, Captain Barkley of necessity becoming a confidant. Guy told us all. How our hearts ached for him! Thomas Barkley took up the wrong warmly, and clasped Guy's hands, and said that henceforth he should be dear to him as a brother."

"And a true brother he has been to me to this hour," added Guy: upon which Leolin began to feel somewhat small, as he remembered the animosity he had been cherishing towards that gentleman.

"Captain Barkley took Guy that night to his own quarters," continued Sybilla, "passing him off as a servant of his mother's, despatched out to him on a confidential mission; in private treating him with the deference and consideration due to the unfortunate Lord of Pomeroy. We did not intend to keep Guy with us long, neither would he have stayed: it was too hazardous; but he caught an attack of fever. We nursed him through it, and then he departed again, to be a wanderer, as he expressed it, on the face of the earth. He and George made all their necessary confidential arrangements; George remaining ostensibly the chief of Pomeroy. Guy wanted him to accept all the revenues, excepting a mere pittance for his own support—I think you and he nearly quarrelled over that point, did you not, Guy?"

"Something like it," answered Guy, a faint smile for the first time parting his lips.

"It ended in George's accepting a fourth—I think it was—for our own use: the rest, though regularly transmitted to George, was invested by Major Barkley for Guy. Since George's death, I have retained only the same sum—a fourth. You have wondered, I know, at my living so quietly, Leolin," she added, her eyes seeking his; "you did not know, and I dared not tell you, that the rest went to Guy."

No, Leolin had not known it; could not have suspected it. He was taking shame to himself for the hard thoughts he had given to Sybilla.

"And this accumulation of money will now pass to you, Leolin," put in Guy. "Barkley has done all that is necessary in readiness for the transfer. I always intended it for you: as soon as my death takes place it is yours."

"You are too generous," murmured Leolin, again suppressing the ready tears. "But surely I have no claim to it?"

"Who else has a better? My own child is amply provided for; Sybilla will take the whole of the revenues now: she and her little son. I went again to India not long before George's death."

"Again!"

"Ay. Ever restless: flying continually from one place to another, never remaining long anywhere, ever yearning for the home and the relatives that were never to be mine: my feet turned, of themselves, once more to India and to George."

"I—I—cannot quite see yet," burst forth Leolin, to whom a remembrance suddenly suggested itself: and, in truth, one puzzle after another crowded so rapidly through his mind as to utterly bewilder him. "If Rupert died, as you say, Guy, how could he have come over here from Spain in a barque? Hilkyard's head-clerk made the passage with him."

"It was I who came, not Rupert," answered Guy. "I have heard of that from Sybilla. Collins mistook me for Rupert. It was easy for him to make the mistake, natural that he should do so. He knew Rupert well; he did not know me, for he had never seen me; moreover, he believed me dead."

The resemblance deceived him, and he fully thought he saw Rupert. Charles Knox fell into the same error a few weeks ago. He saw me on the beach, and spoke to me for Rupert. Mrs. Wylde's man, Cannet, met me one night before I had made my escape at all, and mistook me for Rupert. Don't you perceive how natural it was that they should all make the mistake, believing it was Rupert who was living and I who was dead?" added Guy.

"I do; I see," mused Leolin. "Did you land from the Spanish barque?"

"Of course I did, and made my way here, to Pomeroy. Not for the first time or the last, Leolin. Is it any wonder that I should so yearn after this, my home, that I could not keep altogether away from it? Four or five times since my death have I come here."

"It was a risk, Guy."

"It was. But I disguised myself cautiously, and chanced the peril. Old Jerome was always on the look-out for me, I believe, not knowing when I might appear: wearing the flesh off his bones with terror when I was here: inventing excuses to keep people out of the keep. Do you remember his excuse to you, Leolin, not long ago, when you came here before, ten o'clock one morning, and nearly pulled the bell down? I was in bed at the time, and had to dress hastily and conceal myself—who knew but you might take a fancy to walk upstairs here. You asked Jerome what he trembled at: he was trembling for me. Poor faithful old man! His has not been a path of roses."

"And so this ghost, that has so terrified the abbey from time to time, has been yourself. And you knew this," Leolin added, turning to Sybilla.

"Certainly I knew it," she replied. "Stay, Leolin! I see what that reproachful look means: you think I ought to have told you. But I could not: I had given a solemn pledge of secrecy to Guy. Once or twice I thought you must have suspected the truth, when I insisted upon it that *the lord* was the lord still. You could not expect me to call the erring Rupert Lord of Pomeroy. At least, you ought not to have expected it."

"How could such a supposition occur to me," returned Leolin. "I had seen Guy buried with my own eyes; others, as we were led to believe, had seen Rupert since, living: the very wildest stretch of imagination could never have pictured the truth. Guy, why did you show yourself in that manner to terrify us?"

"Do you fancy I did it for pleasure?—or to frighten people?" asked Guy. "No, no. Could mortal man, in fair health, accustomed to activity, immure himself within the walls of this confined keep every hour of the four-and-twenty? I could not. I was obliged to steal out in the dusk and darkness to stretch my limbs, to walk the consuming fever out of my frame: and, can you wonder that I have frequented that west-tower, whence I could look down upon what was once my happy home; upon the servants that were once mine—upon, now and again—*my child*?"

"You have frightened some of them nearly to death, Guy."

"People do not die of fright," he answered. "The mystery will shortly be cleared for them, for I am only waiting for death. They can make the ghost a jest for the future, Leolin."

Leolin bent over his brother, his voice taking a tenderly anxious tone. "You talk of dying, Guy, but I know not what disease is upon you. Is it curable?"

"Quite incurable. It is an inward complaint, induced by anxiety, mortification, and grief; and it is sometimes lingering in its process, as it has been in my case."

"But you should have advice for it."

"I have had that. When the symptoms became unmistakable, I was in Canada, Barkley with me as usual——"

"Barkley seems to have been a true friend to you," impulsively spoke Leolin, the entrance of Jerome affording opportunity for the interruption.

"There is a 'friend,' you know, 'that sticketh closer than a brother.' Barkley has been that friend to me. Only for short intervals has he left me, since he sold out at George's death. He has gone about with me from place to place, at home and abroad, shielding me in all ways, looking out for any danger that might be ahead. When I have been here,

Barkley was not far off. Sybilla is giving him house-room now, for my sake. But, about my illness. I was in Canada when the symptoms grew too serious to be neglected; not thinking much of the doctors over there, we came home. Barkley took a small furnished house in an obscure part of London, and called in the best medical aid to be had, representing me as a friend from Australia. My fiat—speedy death—was soon pronounced, Leolin: there was no hope.”

“No hope!”

“None. Alleviation there might be, but not cure. We stayed there many weeks, indeed months; everything being done for me that could be done; the disease, meanwhile, advancing slowly and surely. When it had pretty nearly spent itself, when a few weeks, as the doctor thought, would bring the end, then I came down here to the keep and Jerome—for I should not like to die away from Pomeroy. See what it has made of me,” he concluded, holding up his wasted arm. “No ghost was ever thinner than I am. And I think now you have all the explanation, Leolin.”

“Not quite,” answered Leolin, running over various items in his mind. “I have yet to learn how you could get into the west wing at will.”

The lord looked up at his old servant. “Shall we tell him the secret, Jerome? In strict usage, according to tradition, it ought to be known only to the reigning Lord of Pomeroy.”

“Ah, sir, what matters it?” answered Jerome, not perceiving that his master had spoken only in jest. “The future Lords of Pomeroy will have less cause for secrets, maybe, than some of the past have had. And Mr. Rupert knew of it.”

“To his cost and mine,” sighed the lord. “There is a subterranean passage, Leolin, from this place, the keep, to the west tower, whence a staircase in the wall ascends to the haunted room. The entrance is behind the nun’s picture; the panel turns noiselessly. That was how Rupert entered that fatal night; it was how I entered—then, and since. There is a set of duplicate keys to all the locks in the west wing: the bunch hangs in the underground passage.”

Leolin turned to Jerome. "You knew of this secret communication between the keep and the abbey?"

"Before you were born, sir. My late master, the old lord, was anxious for this reason that I should live at the keep. He did not care that others should find the passage out. On that fatal evening, when the disturbance called us to the west tower, I, seeing that my own keys were safe in the key-closet, knew that whoever might be up there had entered by the secret passage. Until then I was not aware that Mr. Rupert knew of it. But oh!" added the old man, lifting his hands in appeal, first to Leolin, then to Sybilla, "won't you please leave the lord now? This talking and excitement may kill him before his time."

CHAPTER XVII.

D TO REST.

It was Friday and fast-day. Father Andrew sat at his frugal dinner: two eggs, the loaf and butter, and a potato salad. He was cutting a huge slice of bread when old Marget came in, her cotton gown pinned up round her, her bonnet tilted. She often made a cleaning day of fast-day, and that was her ordinary cleaning costume.

"Here's Jerome come across from the keep, sir," she began: "he wants to have speech of you. I was on my hands and knees, stoning the passage flags, with the lower half-door bolted to keep folks out, when Jerome put his head over the door and says he must see you this moment, whether or no. He's a shaking at the door now—just as if 'twere a matter o' life or death."

"Let him come in," said the priest.

Jerome appeared; some cause of emotion evidently troubling him. His face had never looked so haggard or his eyes so anxious.

"Father Andrew, you must come with me to the keep. There is no time to lose."

"What's up?" asked the father, ready to joke as usual. "Have you a goose for dinner, and want me to help you eat it? I should like to be at your service—but it's fast-day, Jerome."

Jerome's low voice took a more solemn tone. "Father, it is to shrive a dead man."

"To shrive—what do you say?" wondered the priest, who had never known Jerome jest before.

"To shrive the erring soul of a dead man, father: a man who has been dead to the world for more than nine years. I bid you come in the name of the Lords of Pomeroy."

Father Andrew made short work of his dinner, and departed for the keep with Jerome. On the way, he listened to the brief relation of what he thought was the most singular history life had ever furnished.

"I thought how much it could be a ghost," was the first comment he made. "Bless and save us all! The lord alive, and Rupert dead!"

"Ay," said Jerome; "it's a grim and droll thing to look back upon, sir. While the country, that time, was being scoured for Mr. Rupert, he lay mouldering away underground in the Pomeroy vaults; and the lord was hiding at the keep with me."

"And walked out of it at night to terrify the men and maids! A wrong thing, Jerome. I could have supposed Rupert acting so in his mischievousness, but not the lord: the one was gay, the other grave."

"It was that frightened me more than all—the walking out," wailed poor Jerome. "But, oh, father, I believe from my heart he could not help it: he had to walk about, in his terrible restlessness. No wonder he was taken for a ghost; ever since that fatal night he has been growing more like a shadow day by day. Every time he came back there seemed to be less left of him. What he has suffered these nine years, he alone can tell."

"Sorrow and grief will change the best of us," remarked the priest. "Especially if remorse be added. Poor Guy!"

"Blame him not, father," entreated the old man, lifting his careworn face. "True, it was not right to kill his brother; wretchedly wrong: but it may be——"

"May be what?" cried the priest, as Jerome hesitated.

"That what happened at that time could not be gone aside from by him or by her—the lord and his wife. The prediction had to be worked out. Her light and foolish conduct, and his revenge upon it, might have been but just a part of it—of the fate that was hanging over them both—over all the Pomeroy's."

"Don't talk such nonsense, old Jerome," rebuked Father Andrew.

Down by the bedside, her eyes streaming bitter tears, her hand locked in her dying brother's, knelt Joan Pomeroy. It was the day following the one told of in the last chapter, and the lord's last day of life. That only a few short hours of that life remained to him now, was only too apparent.

"To have hidden yourself from us to the last, Guy!" reproachfully sobbed his sister, in her bitter grief. "To have allowed others—Sybilla—and Major Barkley—and Jerome, strangers by blood—to know that you were in life, even to see you at will, and to keep it from us!"

"They knew it before, Joan; I could not help myself," murmured Guy. "It was too dangerous a secret to be disclosed."

That had passed when Joan was first brought in earlier in the morning: but she had never risen from her knees, her scalding tears had not ceased to flow. Leolin was there, also Sybilla; and now appeared Father Andrew, more filled with wonder than he had ever been before. Major Barkley stood at the foot of the bed.

A question had arisen in some of their minds during the night. Leolin put it to his brother.

"Guy, is it to be made known—the fact that it was you who lived—that Rupert died? Would you like it made known?"

Something like a smile actually fitted over the lord's face. "By to-morrow morning I shall be dead as Rupert—what then can it matter to me? It must be made known for the

sake of the young Rupert's rights. They will now be indisputable. A few hours more, and he will be the legitimate master of Pomeroy. Leolin, your opposition to him must cease."

"I thought Rupert was living, you see," stammered Leolin, feeling a great and sudden shame, he could hardly tell why, for his persecution of the child.

"And what though he had been?" retorted Guy, with a touch of his old sternness. "You did wrong, Leolin—and it has not served you. However, the past is ended. Sybilla, Rupert is a brave boy. He will make a more worthy lord than some of the Pomeroyes made, if all tales told of them are true."

"Heaven grant him grace to be all he ought to be!" fervently aspirated Sybilla. "It is the one great aim of my life, under God and the Church, to make him so."

"Ay; I saw that in India. I loved him, too, the brave, right-hearted little lad. Tell him that poor John Cook, to whose bed he used to bring his pretty picture-books, during that fever time, and his pretty loving prattle, was his uncle Guy. He will be a good and true-hearted man: a noble chieftain: Jerome here has sung his praises to me. Sybilla, is it true that he and my child are attached to each other?"

"Very much indeed," she answered, after a moment's pause of surprise. "But, Guy—if I, pardon me, catch rightly the drift of your thoughts—I would remind you that because they are attached as children, it does not follow that they will be so as man and woman."

"I know that," he faintly replied, for his artificial strength, called forth by excitement, was failing: "I was but glancing at a remote contingency. Should the childish love, now existing between them, grow into reality later on, you will not set your face against my child, Sybilla, from remembrance of her mother's sin?"

"Oh, Guy, how could you think there was need to ask it? Indeed you have my hearty promise. I love Mary."

"It was only folly in your wife, Guy," pleaded Joan, lifting her tear-stained face, in excuse for Alice.

"And what, but sin, is such folly as that?" was Guy's

stern reproof. "It was sin to me; sin in *her*; for, in regard to our wives, you knew, and *she* knew, a Pomeroy had ever been held as *sans peur et sans reproche*: and it led to sin, and crime, and misery. Do not excuse her to me, Joan."

"You will see your wife, Guy?" again pleaded Joan, who was always for peace.

"You may bring her to see me when I am dead. I wish her no ill: let her convince herself that the ghost was myself, and so her terror will subside. No more argument, Joan; I will not hear it."

"Only just to speak your forgiveness," implored Joan. "It will be a comfort to her."

"She has my forgiveness; tell her that. To meet would bring only pain to us both; I think I can safely say so; and, what end would it answer? I will not see my wife—as you call her—again in life. I saw her the other night, you know, in the haunted room; looked at her well by the matches I lighted; ay, and touched the hands which she had just sent through the window. Even then, she only came up because she thought it was Rupert."

"To warn him, Guy."

"Just so; to warn him; I think nothing else. No, she and I will not meet; and, remember, that she must know nothing until I am dead. Then give her my forgiveness. Neither will I have my child brought here; better not, for her sake."

"Oh, Guy! would you deprive yourself of giving Mary a last embrace?"

Guy's breast heaved. "Better not, Joan. See what an object I am now. I should only startle her. No: I have borne a great deal of late years, and I can bear that. I have left a long letter for her. Tell her that her father loved her always; that he has had nothing else to love, save her, for years and years. And now—if you please—I would—be left—with Father Andrew. I am growing faint."

"Leolin, shall it not be peace between us at last?" whispered Sybilla, as they went out, her sweet eyes seeking his. And Leolin's answer was to put his hand frankly into hers.

"It is of no use striving against fate, Sybilla," he said. "Your child must be the undisputed lord now ; no wish of mine and no scheming can alter it. But I no longer have the wish. Last evening, before I heard the startling fact of Guy's return, I had promised my wife never again to take act or part against Rupert. I may love the boy yet. I might have loved him before, but that I steeled my heart against him."

"And I may be truly, really friendly with your wife?"

"I hope you will be. Come with me and see her now. Sybilla," he added with emotion, "knowing what I now know, I can only apologize to you for the past, and I do so with all my heart. Every moment's reflection brings to me a greater sense of shame for the part I have acted."

"Leolin, say no more—in my mind I have ever excused you," was Sybilla's generous answer.

"And when your son is older, I shall express my contrition to him."

With the grey light of morning, Mrs. Pomeroy, in much wonder and dread, was taken by Joan and Sybilla to the keep. Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, lay there, dead now. Sybilla, with her woman's heart, had prepared Alice as gently as she knew how for what she was to see: nevertheless, when brought face to face with him who had once been her husband, she started back, as Leolin had done, with a cry of terror.

"There is no reason for fear," spoke Sybilla. "He is at rest at last—gone to rest and peace. He bade us say that you have his full forgiveness for the past, his good wishes for the future."

"And—he—has only died now?" gasped Mrs. Pomeroy, who could not at once realize the stupendous facts.

"Only now. He died at dawn this morning. It was Rupert who died on that fatal night; not Guy."

"And he has been still Lord of Pomeroy;" breathed Alice; her mind confused. "None other had a right to be so. And I might have continued to be the Lady."

No one answered this. Even Father Andrew, who had

generally a kind word for all, stood with folded arms and bent brow. Poor thing, she had probably meant nothing by the remark.

"Why did you bring me here?" she asked, with a burst of tears.

"To see him," compassionately spoke Sybilla. "To show you that what has startled you—and others—so much of late, was himself, not his spirit. He wished you to be convinced of that."

"Better touch him, madam," put in superstitious old Jerome, when she was at length turning away from the sight, her sobs almost choking her. "It is said that if we touch the dead we do not dream of them: better just touch him."

Alice Pomeroy put out her hand and laid it upon poor Guy's cold forehead. But she could not bring him back to life, or restore the happiness of which she had deprived him; she could not hear him speak the forgiveness she had unconsciously yearned for.

What a commotion it was that set in at Abbeyland. The inhabitants ran up in excited groups to gaze at the gloomy ensign hoisted half-mast high at the abbey, and to listen to the marvellous news that it floated for Guy, Lord of Poincroy. Surely never was so wonderful a romance enacted in history.

They *saw* him as well as heard of him. Guy lay in state in the chapel from the day of his death until his interment, and all the world went to look at him. The poor battered face, *his* supposed face, had been covered up that other time, the cloth only lifted at will: now it was open to view; the well-remembered, never-to-be-forgotten face of Guy of Pomeroy.

The funeral ensued. Once more, and in one sense for the second time, Guy Pomeroy was consigned to the vaults of his forefathers; not with the former honours, the stately grandeur given to him before—or rather, in reality, to Rupert. This ceremony was of the simplest. But the crowds assembled to witness it were almost beyond precedent, for the wonder had been made known everywhere.

The circumstances attending that other time were miraculously great, but these were greater.

It took place on New Year's Day. A bright day, as regarded the weather, for the inauguration of the coming year. The ground was glistening with a sprinkling of snow that had fallen in the early morning, the sun shone in the clear and cold blue sky. A contrast to it all looked that dark procession winding out of the abbey, bearing in its midst the velvet-covered bier. Following close upon it, in right of his position as head of the house, walked the young Lord of Pomeroy; behind him came Mary, led by her uncle Leolin; then Major Barkley. Jerome, weeping bitter tears, headed the attendants.

And the death-flag, for the last time in this history, waved over the gates of Pomeroy.

PART THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER LONG YEARS.

It is the height of the London season, and a beautiful day in early summer.

Carriages are setting down their well-dressed freights at the house of Lord Essington, in Berkeley Square: not a crowd of carriages; one now and again, at intervals. It is Thursday; and on Thursday afternoons Lady Essington is always "at home:" and those friends of hers in the great world who remember this, and have time to call, come and do so.

Lady Essington—looking quite an elderly woman now, for many years have elapsed since you saw her last, reader—sits on a sofa in the drawing-room, underneath one of the windows. She wears black silk and crape, and a widow's cap. For alas, the good-natured earl, her husband, so kind to all the world, high and low, so genial and so unpretending, has been dead more than twelve months now, and his only son, the Viscount Cardine, is the present earl. The new earl is not married; therefore his mother looks upon his house as her own still; she has made no attempt to move out of it: it has never occurred to the mind of Lord Essington, her son, to suggest that she should do so. He is easy and careless; indifferent to most things, excepting his own pursuits.

Lady Geraldine Hetley stands near the door, welcoming with effusion three middle-aged sisters just coming in, for they have an old bachelor brother who is very rich; and poor Geraldine, though approaching forty, has not yet given up all hope of being asked to share somebody's name and fortune. Her hair is thin, her face has acquired a per-

manently cross expression: the result of indulging in habitual ill-temper.

In a corner of the room stands the tea-table; a white cloth, cups and saucers, *biscuits and cake* upon it. Behind the table, ready to dispense its favours, sits a graceful girl of middle height, her face one of the sweetest ever looked upon. Her dress is simple: a white muslin with small lilac sprigs upon it, worked in tambour stitch; ribbons of the same colour fall back from her soft brown hair. Her eyes are brown and soft also; earnest eyes that all the world might trust. Her features, clearly cut, are of the highest type of beauty; the delicate colour on her cheeks is of a soft damask rose.

"What are you about?" asks Geraldine, approaching her with a cross whisper. "Why don't you pour out some tea?"

"I am waiting for four o'clock to strike," was the gentle answer. "Lady Essington said I was not to begin before."

"Nonsense," sharply responded Geraldine. "People will be glad of it."

A momentary lull in the room, which was filling now, and the groom of the chambers opened the door to make a fresh announcement.

"Miss Pomeroy."

Greeting Geraldine on her way, Joan spoke a little with Lady Essington, and then found a seat beyond the tea-table. Joan looked taller and sterner and darker than of yore: years seldom soften plain women into pretty ones. Joan was passing through London on her way to Pomeroy, and had come by invitation to remain this afternoon and to dine. She had leisure, sitting in that quiet corner, to look about her, and was doing so when she found herself addressed.

"Will you take some tea?"

It was the sweetest voice Joan had ever heard. Looking at the speaker, standing before her, the tea held out, she thought it the sweetest face she had ever seen. Mechanically Joan took the cup, a little lost in surprise.

"Not any cake, thank you. You—you are not Lucy Blake?"

"Oh no," was the smiling answer. "But I think Lucy will be here presently; Lady Lucy said she should come herself, and bring her."

Joan wondered who she could be—this most lovely girl, who seemed to be domiciled with the Essingtons. When Geraldine sat down by her, to take some tea on her own account, it gave Joan the opportunity of asking.

"Would you not like to take your bonnet off at once, Miss Pomeroy?"

"Thank you; presently. Who is that beautiful girl?"

Geraldine looked round the room, anywhere but at the tea-table. "Which girl?" she asked.

"Here: close by. Handing some tea, just now to that French count."

"Oh—she," slightly spoke Geraldine. "It is Frank Hetley's eldest girl—Annaline."

"To be sure; I might have known it," cried Joan, with sudden remembrance. "She has the same sweet face that she had as a child. Is she staying with you?"

"I am sorry to say she is. *Mamma would* bring her back with us from Florence, though I told her how it would be—that we should want to get rid of her when we could not do so. She thought Annaline might be useful to us during the season. Of course we make her *that*; but *mamma* would like to get her out of the house now, and we don't know how to manage it."

"Why do you wish it?"

"She has turned out the most crafty, deceitful, designing girl, possible: will be the ruin of the family if we don't take care. She is steadily plotting for it."

Fresh arrivals carried Geraldine away to her duties, leaving Miss Pomeroy somewhat puzzled. If she was a reader of countenances, the young lady in question was anything but crafty or deceitful. A few minutes more, and quite incidentally, she received a little enlightenment from Lady Essington, upon whose sofa Joan had then found room. It came through Joan's asking after the earl.

"Edmund?—oh, he is very well," responded Lady Essington in a tart tone, as though the mention of her son's name

displeased her. "I wonder he is not here this afternoon, I'm sure. Wherever we may be now, he is certain to be in our wake."

"And does that displease you?" asked Joan, remembering that in the days gone by the young man had erred on the side of roaming.

"Not when he is attracted by a pretentious upstart, who would like to draw him into an engagement," said the countess. "Oh, I dare say you can guess that I am speaking of Annaline Hetley. I brought her home from Florence quite out of compassion, for her father and mother are poorer than ever, can hardly manage to exist, now my husband and his foolish help are gone. They were glad to let her come. I made a half promise that I would present her, and stand the cost of a dress for it. Will I, though!"

"What has she done?"

"What has she not done?—cajoling Edmund by every means in her power—practising her wiles upon him morning, noon, and night," retorted the angry countess. "I declare that we are beginning to fear Edmund may forget himself, and take a step that never could be redeemed. Fancy what our feelings would be at seeing *her* his wife. I suppose you don't happen to know of any friend about to travel to Florence, Miss Pomeroy? I wish I could hear of some one going who would take charge of her. I should be thankful to send her off to-day."

"Mamma, you are so engrossed with your wrongs that you cannot see and hear me," cried a pretty, laughing woman, who had been waiting to speak. Joan shook hands with her warmly. It was Lady Lucy Blake, once Lucy Hetley. The reader may remember her as having been with the young Lady of Pomeroy when they discovered the stains of blood on the wedding-dress. By her side stood her daughter Lucy, who had been presented only two days ago.

"What treason has mamma been whispering to you about that poor child Annaline?" asked Lady Lucy, taking the seat which her mother quitted to pay attention elsewhere. "That she is designing and wary and wicked, I suppose."

Do not believe a word of it, Miss Pomeroy. The girl is as simple-minded, true-hearted a girl as ever lived. She always was, and she always will be."

"I confess she looks so," remarked Joan.

"She *is* so. It is too bad of mamma and Geraldine. Very wrong indeed of them. Because Edmund has fallen in love with Annaline, and persecutes her with his attentions, they blame her. I don't believe she likes him—or would have him. I and Colonel Blake go to Ireland next week, and I declare I would take her with me out of it all, only that the children have had a slight attack of scarlatina. You are going down to Pomeroy, I hear?"

"Yes; to-morrow," said Joan.

"How is Mrs. Pomeroy? Is she still at the abbey?"

"Oh yes. She is quite well, I believe."

"Do they still see ghosts there?" laughingly rejoined Lady Lucy. But she repented the thoughtless jest when she saw the flush of pain it brought to Joan's pale face.

"*They* were laid with my poor brother Guy," Joan answered gravely. "The superstition was buried with him."

"I beg your pardon," frankly spoke Lady Lucy, putting her hand affectionately upon Joan's.

"Go with Miss Pomeroy upstairs, Annaline," imperiously spoke Geraldine later, when she seemed no longer needed at the tea-table. "She would like to take her bonnet off."

In her unobtrusive, gentle way, Annaline helped Joan to make her brief toilette. It was quite evident that her life had been spent in being useful to other people.

"Thank you, my dear," said Joan, taking her hand when it was over. "I am sure you have a good and kind heart."

Annaline blushed. It was not often that praise was accorded to *her*.

"Are you happy here?"

The tears rose with the suddenness of the question.

"I should like you to tell me all, as you would tell it to your mother, my child. Perhaps I may be of some use to you. Things are not very smooth for you here, I gather."

"Not very," answered Annaline, her voice unsteady.

"Lord Essington loves you, does he not?" pursued Joan, going to the root of the matter at once, in her straightforward way. "Do you love him?"

"I do not even like him," said Annaline. "I could not love him; I could not marry him. I have tried to let him see this, and have kept out of his way when possible. Lady Essington must have seen it, and yet—they are so angry with me."

She broke down with a burst of tears. That every word was true, Joan could see.

"Lord Essington spoke to me this morning; he took the opportunity when they were upstairs with the dressmaker. I told him then it was quite *impossible*, and begged him to let me alone in future."

"Did he ask you to be his wife?"

"Yes," faltered Annaline.

"Well, my dear, it would be a very good marriage for you. And I think Lord Essington might make a good husband, wild though he has been in his day. It is time he settled down."

"Quite time, if he is to settle at all; he is forty years old," acquiesced Annaline. "But I would not be his wife for the world."

"Perhaps you like some one else?"

And evidently, though Joan had only spoken carelessly, Annaline did like some one else. She turned away in her confusion.

"Who is it, my dear? Are you likely to marry him?"

"Oh, it is no one; no, no, indeed, Miss Pomeroy," she earnestly said, the blushes dying away in tears. "I do assure you I am not likely to marry; perhaps I never shall marry. There's no chance of it." "I—I wish," she continued, in a timid, deprecating tone, "that I could hear of something to do."

"Something to do?"

"I cannot remain here; it is most uncomfortable, and they want me away. And poor mamma can do without me at home; she has Mary and Clarice. If I could do some-

thing for myself! Be a governess—or anything of that sort.”

Joan paused. “To relieve them at home, you mean?”

“Yes. We are so many: three girls and four boys; besides Frank, who has got his commission, and is away. The boys are the youngest; and they all have to be educated, you know, Miss Pomeroy. And papa has so little to do it with. My education has been very complete. Surely there would be no harm in making use of it.”

“That would be for your parents’ consideration, my dear.”

“I think they would be glad,” whispered Annaline. “At least, mamma would; she and I have talked of it sometimes. Grandpapa, her father, was not at all rich, and she might have had to go out as governess herself, had she not married. Indeed I cannot remain in this house. I think it would soon give me nervous fever.”

“Miss Hetley is wanted in the drawing-room,” said a woman-servant, putting in her head at this juncture. “My lady wishes to know what she means by absenting herself.”

“Miss Hetley has been detained by me,” spoke Joan, in her haughtiest manner. “Have the goodness to tell your lady that I, Miss Pomeroy, say so.”

Lord Essington came home to dinner: a talkative man, with fat cheeks, a light moustache, and a bald head. He sought occasional opportunities to whisper to Annaline during the evening, and Joan felt sure he had not accepted his refusal.

Not less picturesque than of yore, with its Gothic casements and grey walls, looked the old Abbey of Pomeroy, as Joan approached it in the twilight of the summer’s evening. She generally visited it once a-year, often remaining for several months, for she and the Lady of Pomeroy were closer friends than ever.

Many years had elapsed since the death of Guy. They had been curiously uneventful, compared with the troubled years of excitement that had preceded them. Excepting for the increasing growth of the two children—the young lord.

and Mary—the time appeared to have had nothing to mark its passing. The noble lad of those past days, the self-willed, precocious little girl, were now man and woman.

Upon the death of Guy, which cleared up all the mystery, set straight what had been crooked, things were re-organized in their proper order. The young lord was the indisputable chief from henceforth, and his mother assumed her proper state and duties. She retained the south wing, in which she had previously dwelt, but she also occupied, in addition, the whole of the front pile, and took upon herself the household hitherto deemed essential to the Lords of Pomeroy. Mrs. Pomeroy and her daughter moved into the north wing: it had been their abode ever since. But Mary had continued to make herself at home in the abbey, just as if the whole of it were her especial property. Leolin had at once applied for re-admittance into the diplomatic service of his country; he was appointed to a post on the continent, and there took up his abode with his wife.

One change the Lady of Pomeroy had hastened to make, and that was connected with the west wing. "Do it as soon as I am gone, Sybilla," Guy had said to her in dying; "let the haunted rooms be restored, and made into cheerful, useful habitations." The nun's ghost itself would not have known that west wing now. The subterranean passage from the keep had been blocked up at either end with bricks and mortar. No more ghostly surprises should occur if Sybilla could hinder them. A handsome entrance to the west wing was made from the quadrangle, and a smaller one from the south wing. Windows, looking to the open country, were inserted into the dull dead walls that once had been, and the rooms they lighted were made bright with modern decorations. The lady judged rightly, no doubt, in making that tabooed wing the most cheerful of all. When her son married, that should be his children's nursery, she said.

Least of all would you have recognized the haunted tower. It was converted into an observatory for Rupert, the young lord having shown a strong propensity for star-gazing. And Miss Pomeroy had begged that the nun's picture should not be destroyed, but placed it in her own bed-

chamber, the one which had always been hers at the abbey and always would be. Poor Joan perforce felt compelled to give up many of the superstitions which had been so dear to her heart; but she liked to recall the past stories and to retain their mementos. All these changes and renovations were long past; the abbey had almost forgotten that the west wing was ever gloomy, ever dreaded.

The carriage, containing Joan, drew up at the gateway, and she found the Lady of Pomeroy standing in the hall to receive her. Time had worn better with Sybilla than with Joan: she was still the same noble, the same beautiful woman that she had ever been. No one throughout the county was more respected than she; more sought after and beloved.

"I am glad to have you again, Joan! But I began to think you were lost."

"We arrived an hour-and-a-half behind time," said Joan, as they entered the lady's favourite sitting-room. "Some accident had occurred to a train on the line, and we could not get on. I hope you have not waited dinner."

"Of course I have. Do you think I—"

"How do you do, Aunt Joan?"

With very much the same self-assertion that had characterized her childhood, Mary Pomeroy entered. She was one-and-twenty now, and a beautiful girl, upright and stately, but not tall. Very beautiful she looks this evening in her low dress of pale blue silk, a gold chain and cross lying on her neck. She is not much like Guy, except that she has his eyes: not much like her mother. Her hair is of a light brown shade, her features are faultless, and the colour on her cheeks may be likened to a delicate tint of vermilion, rather than of rose. Mary had been educated at the convent, only leaving it when she was nineteen, and then with reluctance. She was wont to say, in her peculiarly open fashion, that, had fate not marked her out to be Lady of Pomeroy, she should have liked to remain at the convent for life. Last year she had gone to London to make her curtesy at Court, and had remained a few weeks with her aunt, Mrs. Capel, who presented her. Mary and her mother

did not get on very well together: the girl was too daringly independent, too fond of her own will, as she had been when a child. Mrs. Pomeroy led a most retired life, and that did not suit Mary. She had become what the French call *dévôte*, was fond of chapel, penances, prayers, and fastings. Mary did not like this at all; there was too much of it, she boldly told her mother; and she escaped frequently to her aunt Sybilla, by whom she was taken about on visits.

"I have come to dine with you, Aunt Sybilla."

"Surely, my love. I wished to persuade your mother to come also."

"You could not do that! This is one of mamma's self-imposed fasts, Aunt Joan. You know what a *dévôte* she has become."

"But that is what you ought not to say, Mary," admonished Joan, who by no means always approved of Miss Mary. "I fear you try your mamma."

"Mamma tries me," corrected the young lady. "You don't know what it is, Aunt Joan, or how fearfully dull the life I have to lead. I have no companion, not a soul to speak to but Aunt Sybilla. I am not sure but it would be best to run away."

"Where should you run to?" grimly asked Joan.

"Anywhere. I *shall* run away too—unless Rupert speedily comes home."

"What news have you from Rupert?" questioned Joan of the lady. "Is he still abroad?"

"Yes," answered Sybilla with a suppressed sigh. "The last letter I had from him was dated Vienna. But, Joan, you had better prepare for dinner."

The young Lord of Pomeroy had been away from home for six years now, on and off: paying only flying visits to it occasionally. At first, in pursuance of his college education; later, for his own pleasure. When he became of age he stayed for a month or two in London, was presented at Court, and made acquaintance with people of his own rank, old friends of the Pomeroy family. Afterwards he had gone abroad on a visit to his uncle Leolin and Lady Anna; and he was abroad still.

Sybilla had expected him back long ago. On the return of each Christmas-tide, she had thought that he would certainly spend it with her: and she found herself mistaken. Rupert wrote frequently, most affectionate letters, in nearly all of which he *spoke* of coming home. But he did not come. The lady felt aggrieved, Mary angry; and Mrs. Pomeroy was uneasy lest the golden dreams, which she still cherished for her daughter, should be imperilled.

"Mary is wilful as ever, I find," observed Joan the next day, when speaking with Mrs. Pomeroy.

"She is more so," sighed Mrs. Pomeroy. "I know not what to do with her; I am perpetually haunted by fears that she will outrage custom and propriety by some intolerable act. She will gallop off to the convent alone, without even a groom behind her, and gallop back again after dark. Sister Mildred—now the Lady Abbess, as no doubt you have heard—is perfectly scandalized; but all she can say to Mary makes no impression upon her."

"Mary complains that she is dull here," observed Joan.

"She is so. How can I help that? Her aunt takes her out, but she does not visit very much during this absence of Rupert's—an absence which appears to me, Joan, curiously prolonged. I can see that Mary resents it in her heart; it makes her more restless than she would otherwise be."

"Mary always seemed to think the world was made for her own gratification. Why should she allow Rupert's movements to trouble her?"

"Why should she not?" retorted Mrs. Pomeroy, but her low voice was not raised or her subdued manner ruffled. "She is to be his wife, I suppose."

"Are you cherishing that idea?"

"Certainly. Have you anything to urge against it, Joan?"

"I have not. I should like to see her, poor Guy's child, Lady of Pomeroy. A dispensation would have to be sought, I suppose; they are cousins——"

"That is easily obtained."

"But," continued Joan, unmindful of the interruption, "I cannot help remembering that another may object to it,

whose will in the matter is of more consequence than mine—Rupert himself. When young men go out into the world, they sometimes forget home ties."

The very thought that was beginning to render Mrs. Pomeroy uneasy. "It has occurred to me lately that I might take a companion for Mary," she resumed, quitting the subject: "a young gentlewoman of her own age, who would share her pursuits. I feel almost sure it would answer. What do you think of it? I wish I knew where to look for one who would be in every way eligible."

A companion—a young gentlewoman of Mary's own age. Over Joan's mind came rushing the image of Annaline Hetley. She might serve *both* the girls by bringing her to the abbey.

"I know of one," she answered, rather impulsively, "and I do think that it would be a good thing for Mary. Yes: if you approve, Mrs. Pomeroy, we will write for her to-day."

CHAPTER II.

· NAOMI'S REVELATION.

THE two young ladies stood gazing at each other. Mary, all impulse, had eagerly adopted the idea presented to her of a companion; and Annaline Hetley had come down without delay. The young stranger stood before Mrs. Pomeroy, her sweet face blushing.

"I shall like you very much," cried Mary, in her impulsive way. "Aunt Joan said you were pretty and nice; but I did not picture you so pretty and nice as this. Will you stay with me always?"

"Yes—if you wish it—if you can let me be of use to you," answered Annaline; grateful almost to tears at the warmth of her welcome.

Impulsive, warm-hearted, proud, self-asserting, generous: Mary had all these and other contradictory qualities. On

this, the first day of Annaline's arrival, she could not make enough of her. They played duets together, they sat side by side at dinner, they wandered in the garden in the evening sunset, they talked of their past experiences: Mary freely, Annaline as far as she dared, for she did not yet feel at home at Pomeroy. Annaline's past appeared to have lain in close study, in useful sewing, in helping her mother with the younger children, in patiently sitting by anyone's side who was ill. Mary's experiences seemed to lie in exercising her own will and pleasure, in having swayed the world around her; in small power of all kinds, in revelling in indulgence.

"But you could not have quite your own way in the convent," thoughtfully observed Annaline, as they resumed the conversation the following day.

"I had it very much—more than the other girls would have thought of hoping for," said Mary. And she was right. The convent had begun by petting, loving, and indulging the self-willed little girl, and the convent found it had to continue to do it. The Pomeroy's were the chief patrons and benefactors of the convent, and this pretty plaything was the child of one of the lords.

"You were there eight years, only coming to the abbey for Sundays and sometimes for the holidays," repeated Annaline. "It must have become like a home to you. Were you not sorry to leave it?"

"I never should have left it but that I am to be Lady of Pomeroy," said Mary.

The colour suddenly rose and fell on Annaline's transparent cheeks. Some emotion stirred her. Mary went on, not having observed it.

"When the time came for me to leave the convent, and I found how much it would cost me, and saw how truly happy I had been there, I hesitated. I think I was the best part of an hour making up my mind whether I should remain, or not. But, though it cost me something to give it up, it would have cost me more to give up Rupert Pomeroy. As his wife, you know, I shall rule the world: as much of it as lies around us."

"Yes," replied Annaline, in faint tones, feeling that a reply was expected from her.

"I will drive you to the convent this afternoon," added Mary. "Grandmamma will think I should take you first of all to her; but she must wait. We shall have to be back in time for dinner at seven. We dine with Aunt Sybilla, you know. I think she invited us because it is one of mamma's fast days."

Accordingly, in the afternoon, the young ladies started for the convent in Mary's pony-carriage. They were back about six, and hastened to dress. Both came down in white silk. Mary's was new and costly; Annaline's a turned gown that had been given her by Lady Anna: but it looked fresh and dainty, and the girls themselves were beautiful.

"How lovely you look!" said Mary, regarding her critically. "You shall be my best friend always, Annaline: my sister."

Passing through the cloisters, they gained the archway and entered the fine old hall. Very much to Mary's surprise there stood in the hall the Lady of Pomeroy, Joan by her side, and behind them a formidable array of servants; all wearing an aspect of expectation.

"What does it mean?" cried Mary. "Are you assembled here to welcome *us*, Aunt Sybilla? Very attentive of you, I must say."

"Hush, Mary; it is Rupert that we are about to welcome. His carriage is now coming up the sweep. Listen!"

"It was even so. After his long absence, Rupert was returning with no more notice than this. Half-an-hour ago, a messenger had arrived from Owlstone to say that he was on his way.

The carriage thundered in at the gateway. Cox, the custodian and chief retainer of the abbey, threw wide the entrance, and the next moment Rupert had sprung out and stood before them. Right noble looked he; stately as any Lord of Pomeroy that ever preceded him; with the high, finely-carved features of his ancestors, with his own wonderful violet eyes and their sweet expression.

He turned to his mother first; then to his aunt Joan,

Then, half-dazzled by the sea of faces, he saw Mary, and was advancing to her, when his eye suddenly caught the blushing face of Annaline Hetley.

As if some joyous sight had unexpectedly opened upon him, Rupert turned to her, neglecting Mary, his countenance overspread with a sudden radiance, his hands outstretched. He took both her hands in his, and spoke in a soft glad whisper.

"Annaline! I did not expect to see you here. This is indeed a surprise."

Her own face had turned white as a lily. She withdrew her hands from his, shrinking from the notice they were attracting, and fell into the background. Rupert appeared to recollect himself, and looked round at others.

"You have forgotten *me*!"

The words, spoken in haughty tones of pain, came from Mary Pomeroy. Rupert gazed at her for half a second, and then took her hands as he had taken Annaline's.

"Is it really you, Mary! With so many dear faces of welcome, I feel bewildered."

The servants came next; and then Rupert conducted his mother upstairs. Later they came down again to the banquet. A grand banquet to-night, held in the state banqueting-hall, hastily made in honour of his arrival. Father Andrew, jovial as ever in his increasing years, said grace, but Mrs. Pomeroy declined to appear. She never allowed any pleasure, no matter what the temptation, to interfere with these, her days of penance.

"You have come to remain?" asked Father Andrew of the lord.

"I hope so. For good."

"That's well. The lady has missed you sadly."

"I am sure she has," replied Rupert, with a loving glance at his mother. "But," he added, as if in apology, "it was better to get all my rovings over, than to come back unsatisfied. I shall not care to leave home again."

"I retract the words I spoke to you. And I am ashamed for having been beguiled into speaking them to one so

deceitful. I would rather make a friend of a serpent than of you!"

With all the repelling scorn that the Pomeroy's could put on at will, stood Mary Pomeroy as she spoke the above to Annaline. It was the morning of the day following Rupert's arrival, and Annaline was seated quietly in the red-room, copying music, when Mary Pomeroy entered, and began thus to reproach her.

"Indeed, I am not deceitful," pleaded Annaline, tears of dismay filling her eyes as she rose from her seat. "I try to be true always."

"Very true, was it not, to pretend you did not know Rupert Pomeroy," rejoined Mary, "when you and he met each other yesterday as if you were on terms of intimacy! If there be one vice we Pomeroy's despise above all other vices, it is deceit."

"Oh, pray forgive me!—pray remember!" shivered Annaline. "I pretended nothing. I said nothing. I never mentioned Rupert Pomeroy."

"I mentioned him," flashed Mary. "I spoke of him a hundred times yesterday, and you did not respond. You appeared not to know him; tacitly allowed me to think that he was a stranger to you. If you do not call that deceit, what do you call it? Pray, when and where did you meet Rupert Pomeroy?"

"Last year, at Leolin Pomeroy's," explained Annaline. "Lady Anna invited me to Vienna, and I was staying with them when he came there. Afterwards, when I was at home again, he came to Florence."

"Did he remain long?"

"Yes, for he fell into some trouble, and——"

Mary's dark grey eyes were shooting forth their anger. "Fell into trouble? How dare you presume to traduce him?"

"It is true," meekly urged Annaline. "It was not wicked trouble, only political. Some friends of his were staying in Florence, and he was drawn into it by them. The authorities wanted to proceed against him: papa had to exercise all his diplomacy to prevent it. It took a great

deal of time, and of money, too, to put it right: money of Rupert's."

"And your people were intimate with him during the process?"

"Yes. For a fortnight of the time he was in our house. Papa would not let him go out: he might have been taken. That would have complicated the matter: perhaps have taken it altogether out of papa's hands."

"I should like to hear what this great bug-bear was from Rupert himself. And to *you*, I presume, was assigned the task of entertaining him?"

Not throughout the interview had so disagreeable a tone been assumed by Mary as now. A swift look of pain, at what it seemed to imply, swept over Annaline's face.

"It was mamma who entertained him, I suppose—if he required special entertainment. I was not at home."

"Oh!"

"Our house at Florence is small. To accommodate Rupert Pomeroy, I and Mary had to give up our room: so we went for those two weeks to visit some friends who live at Leghorn."

"All the same, you have been well acquainted with Rupert Pomeroy. And you could come here to his home, to his own family, and not acknowledge it. Very honourable conduct, indeed, Miss Hetley."

Mary swept from the room. Annaline sighed as she sat down to her copying again. Of what use to reiterate her assertion that she had neither intended nor thought of deceit? In truth, she had been too timid, too shy to avow acquaintanceship with the Lord of Pomeroy, unless special opportunity had been afforded her for it: and that had not occurred. Annaline had been kept in the background all her life, and during her stay at Lady Essington's she had been so put down, that she could not possibly assert herself. Any information asked for she freely gave, but she could offer none.

Her tears falling, her fingers busy with their task, she was interrupted by Rupert Pomeroy, who had come in to pay a visit to the north wing.

"Where are they all?" he cried, gaily.

"Mrs. Pomeroy is not yet home from chapel, I think," replied Annaline, surreptitiously wiping away the tears.

"What are you crying for, Annaline?" he asked, coming forward and seating himself at the opposite side of the table.

"Not much," she answered. "It is nothing."

"Thinking of home, I suppose. How came you to leave Berkeley Square so suddenly?"

"I was not very happy there. And when Miss Pomeroy wrote to say I might come here as companion, I was glad to start at once."

"No one is happy at Lady Essington's that I ever heard of," remarked Rupert. "I was surprised, though, Annaline, when I called there on Tuesday night and found you gone."

"Did they tell you I was here?"

"No. Geraldine would not tell me anything—except that you had been very wicked indeed in Berkeley Square, and Aunt Joan had come to the rescue by sending you somewhere else. I thought the shortest way would be to come down and ask Aunt Joan where the 'somewhere else' was, little thinking what my reward would be."

"Did you want to know?" she asked, bending her face over the copying. "Why should you?"

"I did want to know. Though I don't think I can tell you 'why' to-day. About this wickedness of yours?" added Rupert, a smile lighting his eyes. "What was it? Did you steal one of Geraldine's ancient lovers from her? It must have been something of the kind, judging by her sharp tones. Lady Essington had gone to bed with a cold, or I should have got it all out of her."

Annaline was carefully scratching out a false note that her pen had made, and did not answer.

"Had Essington anything to do with it? Come, confess to me!"

A startled glance went up from her eyes. His tone was significant. Had Geraldine betrayed *that*?

"Have you seen papa, and mamma lately?" she asked, rather hurriedly.

"I saw them all, for I took Florence on my way home. And I have some news for von."

"Yes?"

"Mary is going to reward the constancy of that young attaché who has been dying for her so long."

"Oh!" exclaimed Annaline. "You must mean Charles Seymour. I am very glad; Mary likes him very much."

"Seymour? Yes, that's his name. A tall, thin, near-sighted fellow."

"And papa has consented?"

"So far as not to forbid it. He had had to live upon bread-and-cheese himself, he told Seymour, through marrying when he and his wife had nothing to marry upon: if he and Mary chose to be so foolish as to do the same, they might marry."

"Dear papa! But Charles may get promotion."

"He may. I suppose Uncle Leolin will have to look after him. What are you copying so industriously?"

"One of my manuscript songs. Miss Pomeroy wished me to copy it for her."

"And now tell me what you are doing, here, at Pomeroy."

"I came to be companion to Mary Pomeroy. If—if she will only put up with my poor abilities, my wish to please her, and let me see what she wants and how best to serve her, I dare say I shall get on here. It is far pleasanter than being a governess."

"Does the alternative lie between the two?"

"Yes, I fear so. I must be brave, and do my best. We are so many at home, you know, and so much has to be spent on the boys."

"I see," said he gravely; nevertheless there was a smile in his eyes. "And now, as you must have done enough work for one morning, suppose you come with me into the grounds. I should like to show you all the dangerous places: the rocks down which you might fall, and the lake in which you might be drowned."

"I don't know whether I *may* go," replied Annaline, her heart beating with delight at the prospect. "Mary

Pomeroy might not care to go—and I do not know where she is."

And when Mrs. Pomeroy returned from her prolonged devotions, she found Annaline copying still, and the Lord of Pomeroy talking to her.

That Mary, the proud, exclusive girl, who believed that all the world was made for her, including Rupert, should have looked on with flashing eye when she saw another made more of by him than she was, will readily be believed and excused. Annaline Hetley was but her companion, beneath her in position, a stranger at best; and for the Lord of Pomeroy, at his home-coming, to turn from her to pay his first devoirs to this girl, savoured to her mind almost of gratuitous insult. No wonder Mary took it to heart, and spoke out her scorn when she found the offender alone the following morning. Smarting under the blow, nothing could have then convinced her that Miss Hetley was not a perfect embodiment of duplicity.

She had projected a charming ride the previous day, and described to Annaline the horse she should ride and that should be kept as her own exclusive property; a horse as pretty as the favourite one she herself rode. Of course that was at an end now. So, upon bringing her reproaches to Miss Hetley to a conclusion, Mary rode forth alone. In her independent fashion, she said nothing to any one; asked no one's leave to go.

The first thing she noticed, when about to mount, was that Jeffs, the lord's coachman, was there to attend her, taking the place of Lamp, her own groom. It did not please her. She liked Jeffs the better of the two, but she was in a mood to show temper at anything and everything.

"Why are you here, Jeffs? Where's Lamp?"

"Lamp is bad with rheumatism this morning, Miss Mary. He couldn't venture to ride a horse. In fact, Miss Mary, he's almost past his work," added Jeffs.

"Old! I don't believe Lamp's as old as you are."

"He wants just two years of my age, Miss Mary: but he's a good twenty years older in lack of strength. I be one of the wiry ones; shall last out brave to a hundred, I think

sometimes. Lamp's all aches and pains; been a martyr to 'em."

That Lamp, with his "aches and pains," could be of no use to her this morning, appeared evident. Mary mounted without saying more, and cantered off, followed by Jeffs.

She allowed her horse almost to take its own course. It was a hot morning, but Mary heeded it not; the slight breeze fanned her face as she made for the common. Onwards towards the pine forest now rode Mary. The cottage of Naomi Rex came into view: an impulse took the young lady that she would call and ask after her. Whence do they arise, these impulses? Sometimes they are weightily fraught, either for good or for evil.

Mary reined in her horse at the gate. Bridget heard, and came out smiling. For some months past Naomi had been ailing: no particular disorder, Mr. Norris said; it was the weakness of old age. She was between eighty and ninety. Her mind was partially gone; that is, she was childish at times; though clear enough at intervals. Naomi's little maid, Ann, had grown up and gone the way of other young women—had married: and Mrs. Pomeroy had spared Bridget for a time to take care of Naomi. Or, rather, Mary had done so: for she had proposed and settled it.

"How is she to-day, Bridget?"

"Just the same, Miss Mary. I have but now got her up. Would you not like to come in and see her?"

"I think I will. Jeffs."

"She has been rambling like anything this morning," observed Bridget, as Jeffs took the horse, and Mary went into the house. "Something's been troubling her about the late lord, your poor papa, Miss Mary. I can't help fancying that she has dreams at night, and gets moithered about them the next day."

Naomi was sitting at the open window, her dim eyes wandering out to the landscape beyond: the blue sea on the right, lying still and beautiful under the clear sky, the convent chimneys rising to the left, the grand old abbey in front. At the first moment the old woman recognized Mary, and strove to rise to drop her humble curtsy; but

Mary gently pushed her into her seat again and sat down by her.

"It's very good of our young lady, aunt, to come up and see you this hot morning."

"Very good, very good," vaguely assented Naomi, her eyes wandering again—and perhaps her mind also. Bridget, having thus settled them, whisked out to hold a gossip with Jeffs. It had been beyond Bridget's philosophy to forego the opportunity.

"What do you see particularly in the abbey, Naomi?" questioned Mary, perceiving that the old lady was regarding it most attentively.

"I was looking for him to come safely back," answered Naomi, in a whisper. "He rode forth just now. Hark! perhaps we shall hear his horse's hoofs."

"Who rode forth?"

"The lord."

Just at first, Mary thought she alluded to the present lord, and had seen Rupert ride out. But the next moment's reflection showed her the fallacy of that idea. Even quick and young eyes could scarcely have discerned a horseman at that distance. And she knew that Naomi had relapsed into one of her mental wanderings.

"What good sight you must have, Naomi!" she said, laughing pleasantly. "I should not know the lord from here."

Naomi placed her finger upon Mary's sleeve, speaking solemnly. It became evident that she thought she was addressing Joan.

"He rode forth just now, Miss Joan; I saw him. He has gone to ask that false woman to be his wife. He couldn't go from his fate, you know, in the teeth of the Prediction. She and her mother came here and took the White House of you Pomeroyes, and so—he met it. No; Guy Pomeroy could not escape from his fate."

"It is *papa* her poor old head is running upon, not Rupert," thought Mary.

"It is said, you know, Miss Joan, that he won her by a lie: but we've never understood it, for all the lords of

Pomeroy that I have known have been true and honourable. Any way, be it as it would, that was no just cause for her to turn upon him and disgrace herself. It disgraced you all, Miss Joan; it entailed a life-long stain on her child, sweet little Miss Mary, for the shame of her mother's folly must cling to her as long as her life shall last."

"What does she mean!" thought Mary, her face growing painfully warm.

"And it led him to murder Rupert, you know, Miss Joan. While we took it, all those years, to be the lord that had died, and mourned for him, and put up masses for his soul, it was Rupert. The poor lord was an exile, wasting away his days in pain and sorrow, never as much as once looking on the face of his only child."

Wild though the words were, there seemed "method in them." Some of the things she spoke of Mary knew to be facts: her father's supposed death, for instance, when it had been Rupert's.

"Naomi," she said, her voice more timid than it had ever been, as if she dreaded the answer: "why do you imagine such things? Mamma never did anything wrong."

Naomi looked puzzled—her thought was checked for the moment. She put her hand to her brow and gazed full in Mary's face.

"Your mamma, Miss Joan?—no, I don't think she did: I never heard it. Any way, she was gone before Guy's wife brought the disgrace on him. How dared she play off her pranks with Mr Rupert to shame the lord before us all?" added the old woman with startling vehemence. "Was it not honour enough for her that she had been made the lord's wife? Shouldn't that have contented her, without making their name a by-word?"

"What on earth are you chattering about, Aunt Naomi?" broke in Bridget, who had returned to hear this treason, and halted at the door in surprise and dismay. "Miss Mary, don't heed her; when she sets off on her rambles, she invents the most outrageous stories it is possible to imagine."

"What wrong was it that mamma did, Bridget?" questioned Mary, standing up before the servant.

"Wrong that she did? Well, now!—if ever I heard the like of that!" retorted Bridget, attempting to pass the question off in a show of astonishment. But, to Mary's watchful senses, the faint pause the woman had made, and the evasive tone, were clearly perceptible.

"What was it, I ask you, Bridget?"

"It was *nothing*, Miss Mary," spoke the woman, resolutely. "There. I'm sure I don't know what aunt's head runs on half her time. Only a day or two ago, she fancied Father Andrew and Mr. Norris were up here card-playing; she did, if you'll believe me."

Mary said no more. She bade Naomi good-morning, and went out with Bridget, mounted her horse, and rode slowly away. Bridget returned to read her aunt a lecture on the expediency of not allowing her tongue to run on these past matters before Miss Mary Pomeroy. "But, there, where's the good of warning you," concluded Bridget, "when you've no more sense left than a baby."

With all the latitude in the matter of ghost stories, the indulgence of every foolish whim and wish, accorded to Miss Mary Pomeroy during childhood, one disagreeable remembrance had been sedulously kept from her—the folly wrought by Guy's wife. Not a word had ever been breathed in her ear that could tarnish her mother's fair fame. Had any one but a poor imbecile woman, past the age of reason, hinted at it now, Mary would have flown into a passion of indignation. She could not do this with poor Naomi, and the calmness maintained had tended to keep her judgment clear. But something in the very words had startled her; Bridget's manner also startled her; and she rode away with the dismayed conviction lying on her heart that there existed some unhappy secret which had been kept from her.

"Jeffs," she said, speaking as she often did on impulse, checking her horse for the old man to ride up, "did you know the particulars of that—that trouble—years ago, between papa and mamma, and my uncle Rupert?"

"Woe's me, I did, Miss Mary. 'Twas known to all the world, worse luck."

"What was it about? What *was* it?"

"Eh?" cried the old coachman, his caution coming back to him all at once—for her calm address, and its matter-of-fact tone, had thrown him off his guard. "I can't tell you about that, Miss Mary."

"Nonsense. How dare you say you can't tell me anything, old Jeffs?"

Jeffs shook his old head. "There be some things we dare not speak of even at your bidding, Miss Mary, and that's one on 'em. If I was capable of talking to you of that, I should expect the late lord, your good father, to come back out of his grave and haunt me for it—just as we used to fancy he came out of it to haunt us while he was alive."

Jeffs backed his horse, as much as to intimate that the colloquy had better cease, and rode soberly home after his young mistress, unconscious that his words had only strengthened her impression that some dark secret had been kept from her. Just as oil, poured upon a fire, serves only to feed the flame.

CHAPTER III.

ANNALINE.

A SOMEWHAT unpleasant atmosphere was setting in at Pomerooy. It had its rise in the presence there of Annaline Hetley.

• That Rupert Pomerooy especially favoured her, was evident to all, most evident to the jealous observation of Mary. She had always been first and foremost with Rupert: she expected to be so still: and to find him dividing his attentions between her and this other pretty girl, mortified her to the last degree. It was wrong in every way, she considered; she, the future Lady of Pomerooy, ought not to be subjected to a rival near the throne, although that rival might be regarded by Rupert as nothing more than a pastime.

Mrs. Pomeroy's eyes were also open to the danger. What if it should imperil the marriage of her daughter with Rupert? Once, let Rupert become enthralled by the charms of this young girl, and trouble might arise. Mrs. Pomeroy did not forget that since Rupert had arrived at years of discretion, he had never once given the slightest indication that he meant to carry out the childish talk of former days, and make Mary his wife. Mary, in her straightforward way, alluded to it without scruple, but Rupert himself had never confirmed it by so much as a word. And to Mary, at any rate, the fear that it could or would be imperilled, had not yet presented itself; the feeling, stirring her heart, was only that general dislike which one young girl experiences when seeing another usurping those favours which she has hitherto looked upon as exclusively hers.

Another, who had maintained silence as to this future prospect, was the Lady of Pomeroy. Now and again some allusion had been made to it in her presence; a random word dropped by Mary, or (a more designed allusion) by her mother. The lady had never responded to it. Sybilla was one of those sensible and good women who are content to leave these weighty matters in the hands of God. If these two young people chose each other, she would earnestly give them her consent and blessing: but she would not do anything to forward the scheme; and she most certainly did not and would not encourage the hopes that were continually entertained by Mrs. Pomeroy and her daughter. 'This they could not fail to see and understand. The decision would lie with Rupert, and with him alone. But Mary never glanced at the possibility of his rejecting her.'

She had grown up to the idea that she was to be the Lady of Pomeroy; that, as the daughter of Guy, she had in some way a right to cherish the prospect as a certainty. But she would never have worked or schemed for it, or gained it by intrigue or coquetry; she was of far too open and honourable a nature for anything of the sort; and when she went to her mother and told her that she would not have Annaline Hetley in the abbey any longer, she was not prompted to the decision by any jealous fear, but simply by

the dislike she had taken to her. Thereupon, Mrs. Pomeroy, by no means reluctantly, went in search of the young lady, and intimated to her that her sojourn at the abbey must terminate. Mary had changed her mind and no longer wished for a companion.

Annaline Hetley sat in her bedroom, whose window looked on to a pleasant prospect; for, in this north wing, the chambers did not all face the quadrangle. The extensive gardens lay underneath; up the coast rose the rocks, with the sea shimmering beyond them.

At last. A whole week had elapsed since Annaline had anxiously looked for a letter, and here it was at last. Upon Mrs. Pomeroy's telling her, civilly and courteously, that her engagement must terminate, Annaline had written to the only refuge she knew of in England—Lady Essington's house in Berkeley Square. She wrote a very proper letter to the countess, saying she was not needed at Pomeroy, and asking to be allowed to return there for a very short time, until she could hear of somewhere else to go to.

For six days Lady Essington did not answer. On the seventh, this letter had come. It was written by Geraldine, and was not an amiable one. They declined to receive Annaline again.

"We have no room for you," wrote Geraldine; "for we have visitors. Miss Pomeroy took you (rather arbitrarily, we thought) out of our hands, and to Joan Pomeroy you must look in your present dilemma. Some friends started for the Continent last week; they would have taken charge of you to Florence: that opportunity has been lost, and I don't know when we shall hear of another. I must add that we think it very strange you should have received this summary dismissal from Mrs. Pomeroy. We hope that you have not been flirting with Rupert Pomeroy as you did with my brother."

With a swelling of the heart, than which nothing could be more painful, Annaline gazed at the concluding lines. For once in her gentle life, she went into something like anger, and tore the letter into fragments.

In point of fact, far from "flirting" with Rupert Pomeroy, Annaline did all she could to keep out of his way, just as she had tried to keep out of Lord Essington's—But not from the same motive. After Mary's attack upon her the morning after Rupert's arrival, she, one of the most modest and right-minded girls in existence, would not be likely to offend on that score.

"But what is to be done?" she presently asked herself, recurring to the more practical part of Lady Geraldine's letter. If I cannot go there, where am I to go?"

Where indeed? Joan Pomeroy was not at hand to be appealed to, even had Annaline liked to appeal to her: which she did not. Joan was little more than a stranger to her, and Joan was at a distance, paying visits. The Essingtons were the only friends she possessed in England. She could not start for Florence alone; and, if she could, she did not possess money for the journey.

A tap at her room-door, and Mrs. Pomeroy came gliding in. She was a sad-looking woman now, though her face retained much of its former beauty; and she wore sombre robes of black silk, and close bonnets. Ah! what a contrast!—between what she was now, and the gay young lady who had been Guy's wife. Mrs. Pomeroy might have sown tares, but she had surely reaped them in all their bitterness. Annaline rose as Mrs. Pomeroy advanced.

"You have read the letter I sent you in, Miss Hetley?" she began in her subdued voice. "I recognized Lady Geraldine's crabbed handwriting: I have often seen it when Lady Anna lived here. Does she appoint a day for your departure?"

What a question it was for the sensitive girl to have to answer! Her colour came and went; her fingers intertwined themselves painfully. Mrs. Pomeroy, looking fixedly at her in her apathetical way, wondered at the agitation.

"I don't know what to do," began Annaline, her voice low with emotion. "Geraldine says—says they have visitors and cannot make room for me. I am very sorry."

"Is there nowhere else you can go? Have you no other friends?"

"None. The Essingtons are all the friends I have in England. I wish I could relieve you of my presence! I wish I knew what I could do!"

What with pain, uncertainty, and distress, she broke down. Mrs. Pomeroy saw the dilemma she was in—that is, that she herself was in, in having at present to keep Annaline. She rapidly ran through the situation in her mind, and decided that it might have been worse.

For she had just learnt that Rupert Pomeroy was about to quit the abbey that morning upon an indefinite visit. Annaline could not do any harm during his absence.

"Never mind," she said, kindly enough. "It cannot be helped. Visitors, have they?—well, I suppose the visitors will not remain long, and then you can go up to them. Meanwhile, though Mary has changed her mind, you must try and be happy with us as long as you remain at the abbey." And Mrs. Pomeroy languidly left the room and returned to the gloom and retirement of her own apartments, leaving Annaline in a state of unhappiness difficult to be described.

CHAPTER IV.

AMIDST THE ROSES.

AT the foot of the miniature rocks, the waving trees overhead, the splash of the cascade murmuring in her ear, the roses throwing out their perfume, sat Annaline Hetley, sketching. An opposite opening afforded a lovely scene, with the gleam of the sea in the distance. She had often wished to sketch it, and had come out now to do so, believing that she had chosen a moment when she should be free from intruders.

Not so. Almost in a line with her, on the same rocks, sat the Lord of Pomeroy, who had come up unexpectedly. Leaning forward, his eyes fixed on Annaline, he was talking

earnestly. To look at the man and not admire his beauty was impossible. He had the exquisite features of the Pomeroy, the violet eyes of his mother; and, though slender, his form promised in time to be every whit as noble as that of his grandfather, John Gaunt.

"I had no idea you were back again," observed Annaline, whose fingers, as they held the pencil, were trembling ominously for the sketch.

"I returned last night. Don't you think I have been away long enough, Annaline?"

"It is not for me to think at all about it."

"No? Ten days since I left the abbey. I have hungered for the sight of you."

"Yes," acquiesced Annaline, purposely misunderstanding him. "We all long to see home again when we are away from it."

"It was not of home that I spoke. Do you remember those days at Vienna?" he abruptly asked.

She remembered them all too well. Rupert watched the bright colour go and come with the retrospect.

"What's this I hear about your wishing to leave the abbey, Annaline?"

She scarcely knew how to answer him.

"Is it your wish? Or Mary's?"

"It was only an experiment, their having me at all," she said, in low tones. "And Mrs. Pomeroy finds it does not answer. Mary does not care for a companion."

"Is it true that you are going back to Berkeley Square?"

"No; they cannot have me," she answered simply. "Geraldine wrote and said so. I—I am in the greatest dilemma," she continued, giving way to her agitation. "Indeed, I would not intrude longer if I knew where to go. If I could hear of any one going over to Florence, I——"

The most unqualified surprise was shining forth from Rupert's violet eyes. "But what is it?" he interrupted: "what do you mean?"

She made no answer: Rupert did not understand. The flush of emotion in her face was fading to paleness.

"Do you know, Annaline, that so far as I am concerned I

should like you to stay here always?" he whispered, his voice low and tender, his eyes gazing into hers. And surely, if love ever sat in eyes, it sat now in his.

"But—you must not say such things to me—you ought not," she replied with emotion. And she was beginning to put up her pencils to depart, when Mary Pomeroy appeared on the scene: Mary, with flashing condemnation and haughty brow.

"Are you *here*, Rupert! I have been looking for you everywhere. Do you know how late it is? We shall have no walk."

"Do you care to walk this morning?" he rejoined. "It is too hot, Mary."

"Yes, because you have allowed the time to go on. Well, we will sit here instead," conceded Mary: "it is pleasanter. Are you getting on with your sketch, Miss Hetley? Not very quickly, I see."

Annaline settled to her work again: it might look more pointed to go than to stay. She had not been out long, she said in answer to Mary. And there they sat, inhaling the scent of the roses that grew around.

Rupert talked and laughed; Mary, recovering her good-humour, did the same: she was even gracious to Miss Hetley; and so the minutes flew by on golden wings.

Presently Annaline quietly put up her sketching, and went indoors, leaving Rupert and Mary to the brilliant morning and the roses and the fair sea in the distance.

Nothing more had been heard from the Essingtons during the ten days of Rupert's absence. During that absence her stay at the abbey had been tolerated, but she felt that it must now come to an end. Where was she to go? What was she to do?

An idea had once or twice dawned upon her—that in her extremity she should appeal to the convent, asking it to afford her a home for the present, to be repaid by her services as a teacher. She had not altogether cared to do this; but it appeared to be the one resource left to her. Opening her little desk, she wrote a note to the Lady Abbess, formerly Sister Mildred, and despatched it.

It chanced that Rupert, the following morning, received a letter from Frank Hetley. Annaline had let her mother know that she was not required at Pomeroy; but, not caring to pain her mother, who had innumerable troubles, and seemed to have had nothing else all her life, she had made light of the affair; perhaps rather more so than she had intended. It was that letter that had called forth this from her father to Rupert Pomeroy.

A gossiping letter, speaking of general matters, of Florence, and of the people Rupert knew there; a letter that Rupert had pleasure in reading. Towards the end these words occurred: "Annaline tells her mother that her services are not required at Pomeroy, and she is in doubt where to go: so I conclude the Essingtons are away again. Will you pardon my presuming upon your kindness, and put up with her at the abbey a little longer—until we can make arrangements for her to return to us. Present my apologies to your mother for my thus venturing to trespass upon her hospitality—but I cannot let the child travel alone. We heard yesterday that Leolin Pomeroy had leave of absence, and was going to England with his wife: they can bring Annaline back with them."

It was apparent that Frank Hetley confused the households at Pomeroy: or he would not have asked the favour of either Rupert or his mother, but of Mrs. Pomeroy. Letter in hand, Rupert went into the breakfast-room. His mother was already seated at the table, waiting for him. She was reading her own letters.

"You are late," she said, as he kissed her.

"Nay, mother, I think it is you who are early," he fondly answered. Few sons loved a mother as Rupert loved his.

"The people are all coming," she observed, as she began to pour out the coffee.

"What people?"

"To dinner. It will be the first state dinner I have given, Rupert, since you went away. I wish you were married," she added laughingly; "your wife would take all this trouble from me."

Rupert began his breakfast, forgetting the letter beside

him. As yet he deemed the affair of very little consequence ; as a matter of course, Annaline *would* remain at the abbey.

"Who is your letter from?" she asked presently.

"It is from Florence—from Mr. Hetley. You can read it when you are disengaged. He seems to be under the impression that Annaline is about to leave the abbey. I don't know what she can have written to him."

Sybilla looked down at her plate. "Mrs. Pomeroy has been expecting her to leave," she observed.

"To leave some time, I suppose ; but there cannot be any necessity for haste. Can there?" he added, struck with the look on his mother's face.

"Well, Rupert, I fancy they think the sooner she leaves, the better: they want her away."

A look of surprise, mixed with a touch of anger, crossed Rupert's face. But it vanished quickly.

"Why should they want her away, mother?"

If the Lady of Pomeroy knew why, she did not say. Possibly some suspicion of the true motive had been gathered by her clear discernment.

"Do you know why?"

"I believe neither Mrs. Pomeroy nor Mary likes her. Especially Mary."

"*Not like her!*" The suggestion appeared to Rupert so impossible that he simply stared at his mother. She smiled slightly.

"Yesterday evening, when you were at Father Andrew's, I paid a short visit to the north wing. Mrs. Pomeroy said a little on the subject to me. Enough to show me that the presence here of Miss Hetley was not desired. She virtually received her dismissal a week or two ago, Rupert, and they expect her to leave."

"I never heard of so arbitrary a thing," flashed Rupert. "It is most unjustifiable. Then, mother, you will ask her to come to us."

The Lady of Pomeroy slightly shook her head. It implied a negative.

"Don't *you* like her?" questioned Rupert in a tone of pain.

"I like her very much indeed. Better than any young girl I ever met."

"Then why do you refuse——"

"Listen, Rupert," she interrupted, her voice changing to seriousness. "Nothing would give more pleasure to myself personally than to invite this young girl. But I do not see my way to doing so. It would be opposing Mrs. Pomeroy's expressed wishes—in a marked degree, and I cannot bring myself to venture on it. I have always, as you know, paid especial deference to Mrs. Pomeroy's wishes; I have always treated her with the utmost respect, because I would not have her see, or think, that I blamed her for the past. It has been rather a difficult course to steer, but I have managed it."

"I can understand all that. But—stay, will you first of all read Mr. Hetley's letter?"

Sybilla ran her eyes over it, and laid it down without comment. Rupert resumed.

"You see—it is an obligation laid on us, mother. If Mrs. Pomeroy dismisses Annaline, we must receive her. It would have to be done were it even the case of a stranger; but the Hetleys are my friends—and you little know what a true friend he once proved himself to me. One might almost call them relatives, through Uncle Leolin's wife."

The lady placed her hand on Rupert's shoulder. They were standing side by side at the window now, for breakfast was over. Abbeyland lay beneath them with its signs and sounds of village life. Beyond rolled the blue sea, bearing its freight of small vessels, the sun glancing upon their white sails.

"And you have learned to like this young girl?" she said, in a whisper. "Have you any especial liking for her, Rupert?"

A moment's startled pause; a rush of colour to his usually pale face.

"Were I to tell you that I *had*, would you object, mother?"

"No."

A day or two went on. And then it became known that Miss Hetley had applied to the convent to admit her as teacher, that the convent had consented, and that she would quit the abbey on the morrow to enter it.

CHAPTER V.

RUPERT AND MARY.

"I TELL you, Annaline, it cannot be allowed. How could you possibly have entertained so absurd an idea?"

Rupert Pomeroy spoke with a slightly raised tone and a flash of his deep blue eyes. The news, just heard, had aroused him strangely: on the impulse of the moment he walked straight to the north wing to forbid the contemplated step. There he found Annaline alone: Mrs. Pomeroy was at chapel; Mary seemed to be nowhere.

"What else could I do?" pleaded Annaline.

"You must remain at the abbey."

"No; I cannot do that," she said, her cheek slightly flushing in perplexity. "Mrs. Pomeroy expects me to leave. It has been very good of her to allow me to stay so long."

"Has it?" retorted Rupert. "Annaline, we are responsible for you, and I tell you that you will remain here for the present."

"Indeed, I cannot," she urged, almost with tears.

"Why not?"

"I—the abbey does not want me. My staying here would disturb its peace."

"The abbey does want you, and you do not disturb its peace. What has come to you, Annaline?"

"I shall be very happy at the convent. And mamma has no objection to my teaching."

"Once for all, Annaline, it cannot be allowed. In this abbey you shall remain until an escort to Florence can be provided for you."

Pomeroy Abbey.

"But——"

"My dear girl, this contention is child's play. Understand one thing: I am master here, and I will not allow you to leave. And," he continued, his voice taking a more tender tone, "if you only knew how welcome you are, how doubly welcome to me, you would never think of leaving."

What Annaline would have rejoined, in her deep perplexity, she alone knew—for Mrs. Pomeroy glided into the room, devotion book in hand. This soft, gliding step and noiseless motion she had acquired of late years: it seemed to be born of her intense sadness, her subdued spirit. Annaline escaped.

"Mrs. Pomeroy, I have come round to see you," began Rupert. "I heard only five minutes ago, that Miss Hetley was entertaining some extraordinary intention of leaving your roof for the convent."

"Yes," quietly replied Mrs. Pomeroy, untying her black silk bonnet-strings.

"This cannot be allowed."

"By whom? I think it rather a nice thing for her."

"By me: though I must ask you to pardon me for saying so. Mr. Hetley——"

"What is the dispute?" gaily demanded Mary, interrupting them, her white morning dress and blue ribbons contrasting curiously with her mother's sombre garments. "How stern you look, Rupert!"

"Mr. Hetley has written to me," continued Rupert, ungallantly taking no notice of Mary, beyond a nod, "placing his daughter under my mother's charge. He evidently thinks, either that you are Lady of Pomeroy, or that it is with my mother Annaline is staying. He has requested that she may remain here until he can make arrangements for her return to Italy. Mr. Hetley is my good friend, and I must see that this is done."

"In that case her stay might be prolonged to an indefinite period, and that, to me, would not be quite agreeable—I have not been accustomed to visitors of late; you know," objected Mrs. Pomeroy, whilst a frown gathered on Mary's fair brow. "The convent is a suitable and proper place for

her, and I am glad the Lady Abbess has been good enough to admit her to it."

"It is not, under the circumstances. And, that she should teach is neither proper nor suitable—nor is it necessary."

"We need not go into this," replied Mrs. Pomeroy, whose subdued voice and unmoved exterior presented rather a striking contrast to the feeling displayed by Rupert. "I am sorry you think it necessary to interfere in this trifling matter, and am certainly at a loss to know what can render the convent unsuitable as a temporary residence: it cannot be for long she will need to trouble it. Unless, indeed——"

"Long or short, Mr. Hetley's daughter cannot be allowed to enter it," interposed Rupert, "or thus to quit the abbey. My mother will no doubt receive her."

"Oh—if you make so great a point of it as that," resumed Mrs. Pomeroy, after a momentary pause, given to revolving matters as comprised in his concluding sentence: "if you really consider that her father would object, it is my duty to retain the young lady here. I did not suggest the convent: I should not have thought of it; the idea emanated from herself, and I was surprised when she informed me of what she had done. She shall remain with us."

"Thank you," said Rupert. "Then I will now write to Mr. Hetley."

He was passing through the cloisters with a light step, when he heard a lighter step hastening after him: that of Mary Pomeroy. She put her arm within his in the free and careless manner that she used to do when a child, and drew him into the quadrangle.

"What is the matter with you, Rupert?"

"The matter?" he answered in pleasant tones. "Nothing."

"But there is. I never saw any one so changed."

"If you mean changed from what I was years ago, no doubt I am. It is only natural I should be. One cannot always remain a boy."

"And not changed for the better," frankly went on Mary. "Never, when you were a boy, would you have attempted to

call in question mamma's private arrangements, as you did this morning."

"I don't know that. If they jarred against the rules of hospitality, I should have rebelled then as I rebel now.* Only, as a boy, I might have carried the trouble to my mother, and left it with her. I feel bound to interfere in this matter, reluctant though I am to do it: and I trust your mamma's good sense will see the thing in the proper light. Is it right, Mary, that Mr. Hetley's daughter should be rudely sent from our walls for a caprice?—and when he has especially commended her to our care? You cannot think so."

"A caprice?"

"What else is it? You, as I am given to understand, felt yourself in want of some young lady to reside here as your friend and companion. Aunt Joan sent for Miss Hetley. She came; appeared to be just what pleased you, and was warmly welcomed. But, ere she was well installed, a caprice takes you the other way: you don't want her, you are tired of her; and you contrive to let this be so apparent, that in her distress at intruding longer upon you, she absolutely offers herself to the convent as a teacher. I declare, Mary, I can scarcely control my anger when I think of it."

"I don't see what business it is of yours."

"It is mine. I feel responsible for what takes place in the abbey. Most certainly no rude discourtesy shall be allowed within its walls, if I can prevent it."

"Annaline Hetley is nothing to you."

"She is this much to me—that her father is my most esteemed and valued friend. Be very sure that for his sake alone, if for no other, I shall protect his daughter."

Mary had released his arm, and seated herself on one of the iron benches, several of which stood round the large quadrangle. Rupert, standing by, took Mr. Hetley's letter from his pocket, and ran his eyes over its contents.

"Would you like to see what he says, Mary?"

"No, thank you," making her rejection very pointed.
"The Hetleys and their concerns are nothing to me."

Rupert slightly knitted his brow, but smoothed it instantly. A smile lay in the depths of his eyes as he turned them full on his cousin.

"It is a pity you should turn angry over this matter, Mary. To me it seems the simplest in the world—but yet one of undoubted obligation."

Mary Pomeroy threw up her head, something very like defiance in her face.

"And so, you intend from henceforth to be lord and master here?"

"I did not say so."

"Superintend all the internal arrangements, and look into all the domestic affairs."

"Hardly that," said Rupert, maintaining his gravity. "My wife—when I have one—might think I was intrenching on her department."

"Are we going to quarrel, Rupert?"

"I hope not. It certainly will not be my fault if we do."

"Why do you provoke me?"

"I do not wish to provoke you," he replied with earnestness. "I think, Mary—pardon me for saying it—you are this morning provoking yourself."

"We used to be the best of friends."

"And can be so still. Why not?"

"You—know—what—I—was to be!" she slowly resumed, the colour deepening on her cheeks, her large grey eyes strained up to his.

"What were you to be?" returned Rupert, not suspecting her drift.

"Lady of Pomeroy."

A rush of red dyed Rupert's face. He did not answer.

"You have promised it often enough. Do you remember?"

"I remember we used to say so, Mary," he rejoined with an effort, his tone that of a man ill at ease; "but we were children then. You could only become lady here by—"

"I know," put in Mary, as if to relieve his hesitation.

There ensued a pause; no doubt one of discomfort to

both. Perhaps Mary expected him to speak; *waited* for it. If so, she found herself disappointed.

"Don't you care for me, Rupert?" she asked at length.

"Very much. I always shall care for you. We have been like brother and sister, you know, Mary. Let us continue to be so: it is my earnest wish."

"As brother and sister," she mechanically answered, displaying no emotion whatever.

"And I am sure you have ruled here a great deal more than I have," added Rupert, laughing.

"Yes: because I ruled you. I should like to rule here still, Rupert," she continued—"if it might be. I have been brought up to expect it."

"But, Mary, you know that we Pomeroyes like to rule on our own score," returned Rupert, laughing still, evidently bent on showing that he wished to treat the conversation as jest, rather than earnest.

"I see—yes, I see," emphatically remarked Mary, pain in her tone and in her eyes. And she rose and disappeared within doors, perhaps not observing that the Lady of Pomeroy had come into the quadrangle and was approaching them.

"What is the matter?" asked Sybilla. "Why does Mary run away?"

All the lightness had gone out of Rupert's face. He had come to a sudden resolve—that of putting a question to his mother: one he had long wished to ask. But he scarcely knew how to frame it.

"Mother, I—I somehow picked up an impression when I was a little lad—children invariably hear what is not meant for them, you know—that—that——"

"Yes, Rupert," she said, surprised at his hesitation. "Go on."

"Well, it is better that I should speak out," he resumed, as if to himself, "and set the matter at rest one way or the other. I gathered when I was a boy, as I tell you, mother, that when Uncle Guy lay dying in the keep, the future—my future and Mary's—was alluded to between him and you. Did you make a promise that Mary should become—my wife?"

"Certainly not, Rupert," was the prompt answer. "Poor Guy naturally wished his daughter to become Lady of Pomeroy, *provided circumstances favoured it when she and you came to riper years*: meaning if you fell in love with each other, and wished it. I promised, should that prove to be the case, to make no objection to your union. That was the only promise, Rupert; and that, you perceive, was a conditional one."

Rupert drew a deep breath of relief.

"Then I am not bound by any one's promise to wed Mary? I am not bound in honour to remain single if I do not choose to wed her?"

"Assuredly not. How can you have imagined such a thing? Were you and Mary speaking of this?"

"Slightly—just an allusion. Mary would like to be Lady of Pomeroy."

"And you would not like it. Be at ease, Rupert: not a shadow of obligation rests upon you."

"No," he said, in low tones. "I like Mary as a sister, just as I used to like her; but my love is not hers."

Sybilla smiled. The arch look in her face told Rupert that she knew pretty surely where his love was given; and Rupert flushed to the roots of his hair.

"She is the sweetest girl in the world, mother: she will be a loving and dutiful daughter to you," he whispered.

"So be it, Rupert. My blessing shall attend you both."

CHAPTER VI.

WITH MRS. WYLDE.

IN her large and handsome bedroom at the White House, lay Mrs. Wylde, a-dying. Not dying to-day, or expecting to die to-morrow; but slowly dying of an incurable complaint that might be long yet in its progress. She knew her fate; had known it for some time now: knew that the

fiat, which would transplant her from this world to a better, had gone forth, and could neither be checked nor resisted.

The once stout woman had become thin almost as a skeleton; the comely face was pinched. Some days she exchanged her bed for the sofa. Theresa, her former faithful servant, had come back to nurse her. Mrs. Pomeroy, dutiful now, whatever she had been in her thoughtless girlhood, as anxiously affectionate as her cold and subdued nature allowed, would have spared more to a mother than the services of a faithful maid.

When attacked by sickness of this prolonged kind, knowing that death stands looming at the end of it, we have leisure to think of our past life; to perfect our repentance for its many mistakes and sins: poor Mrs. Wylde seemed to live in fruitless wishes that some of hers could be recalled.

"The one great mistake of my life, Alice, was that of forcing you on Guy Pomeroy," she observed to her daughter on the afternoon of the day spoken of in the last chapter: for Mrs. Wylde was prone to enlarge on these past delinquencies, particularly after a visit from Father Andrew—and the good priest had just gone out. "It brought nothing but trouble in its train; trouble, and mortification, and misery."

"How often have I begged you to remember, mamma, that nothing can be more useless than to recall what is past and over!" remonstrated Mrs. Pomeroy. "It makes me uncomfortable, and it must make you so."

"Child, it does me good to recall it; to express aloud my bitter remorse. Heaven knows how sincere it is; how differently I would act were my time to come over again."

"Mamma, I came here to-day to speak of the present, not of the past," said Mrs. Pomeroy. "I wanted to tell you that I fear Mary's chance of being Lady of Pomeroy is in peril. Rupert is taking a most extraordinary interest in that young person, Annaline Hetley."

"Let him take it," said Mrs. Wylde. "Leave all to Heaven."

But the latter recommendation fell rather too tamely on Mrs. Pomeroy, considering her devotion. Ambition for her

daughter was just as ripe in her heart as it had been in Mrs. Wylde's heart in the days she was deploring, now long gone by. In fact it was precisely the mother's case over again.

"Annaline Hetley had made an agreement with the convent to take her," resumed Mrs. Pomeroy. "She was to teach—and a very proper arrangement it would have been. Rupert, however, has chosen to interfere—taking care to intimate that his will in the abbey is law. I did not like his tone when speaking of the girl; it betrayed an unusual interest in her. But that it might excite comment, I would despatch her to Florence under a special escort."

Mrs. Wylde lifted her wasted hand in warning. "Don't, Alice; don't think of it. If there is anything between these two young people it is not by separating them that you can thwart it. They may be destined for one another by Heaven—and then neither sea nor land will keep them asunder."

Mrs. Pomeroy felt annoyed. "Can you know what you are saying, mamma? They destined for one another! It would ill besit Rupert Pomeroy to wed a penniless girl; little less than a sin."

"Ah, my child, time was when I thought as you think—that Heaven must look upon our dreams of ambition as we look, and should be expected to forward them. But I have lived to see the fallacy of that, to shrink from its error. Leave Rupert Pomeroy and this young girl alone. Scheme not against them. For my part I have never much thought that Rupert would make Mary his wife. At the very best I have said to myself *perhaps* he will do so. But I have doubted. You know the Pomeroy boast, child—that the wife of the lord must be sans peur et sans reproche. Rupert might not deem that your daughter is so."

Mrs. Pomeroy said no more; she perfectly understood, and drew on her gloves to depart. Bending down to kiss the poor white face that lay on the not whiter pillow, she found herself detained by her mother's whisper.

"There is only one thing that will bring us peace when we come to lie as I am lying, Alice: a clear conscience. Oh, my dear, try and live so that it may be yours. Submit all things to Heaven in simple trust, and let it guide you."

Lying with her eyes closed, listening to the rumble of the carriage wheels as they rolled away in the distance, Mrs. Wylde crossed herself, folded her hands meekly on the counterpane, and began an inward prayer. Tears were slowly coursing down her wasted cheeks.

"Good-afternoon, grandmamma!" interrupted Mary Pomeroy, who had come up to one entrance of the White House in time to see her mother drive away from another. "What are you crying about?"

"Not much, my dear: only my own thoughts. I cry sometimes when I dwell on the past."

Mary took off her hat and sat down by Mrs. Wylde. "I felt dull at home, so walked up to see you, grandmamma. I did not know mamma had been here."

"She did not stay long, dear. We got talking of a matter on which we do not think quite alike. It was about you."

"About me? About me and Rupert?" continued Mary with a subtle instinct. "What about us?"

Not for a minute or so did Mrs. Wylde answer. But she saw no reason why she should not talk to Mary on this subject: indeed, she thought it might be better to do so.

"Your mother says that the union projected between you and Rupert in your childhood is being imperilled—and it vexes her."

"Mamma says that, does she?" quietly replied Mary. "For all we know, grandmamma, Rupert has never meant to carry it out."

"True. I have always had my doubts."

"Always? Why?"

"Because," said Mrs. Wylde, slowly, as if desirous to weigh her words, "because, I thought Rupert might discover reason against it. A man judges differently from a boy, Mary. Rupert is charming; one in a thousand. Nevertheless he has grown up to all the pride of the Pomeroy's; nothing less could be expected; and he may wish to take a wife with no stain upon her. I have just said so to your mother."

The girl drew up her head proudly. "What stain have I about me, grandmamma?"

"In yourself and of yourself, none, my dear. Like Rupert, you are as good as gold. The stain came from your parents."

Mary Pomeroy's hands lay clasped upon her lap; the colour went and came in her fair young face. She was of an intensely reflective nature, strong to resolve and to achieve. That revelation made to her by Naomi Rex in her second childishness, had scarcely left Mary's mind since the hour it was spoken. By dint of questioning old Jeffs, of remarks extracted from others, she had arrived at the assurance that an unpleasant secret—a stain on her father, or her mother, or both—existed. And she resolved now to learn the truth.

"Grandmamma," she said quietly, placing her hand on Mrs. Wylde's, as it lay outside the grey silk counterpane, "I do not know all the particulars of that trouble. Will you tell them to me?"

"Do you know about it at all?"

"Yes. It was something between papa and mamma and Uncle Rupert. I know that much. It was a frightful calamity: and it led to papa's death and to Uncle Rupert's escape. That is what was thought at the time; but it was Uncle Rupert who died, and papa who escaped. I am a woman now, and I ought to be made acquainted with all. It is not right that what is known to the world should be kept from me."

"Perhaps not, child—but I can hardly judge. I wish Father Andrew was here."

"Don't you see, grandmamma, that this half knowledge is taking away all my peace? I am ever dwelling upon it; ever picturing it to myself as—probably—being worse than it was. Better that I should hear the facts from you than from a stranger; and I must hear them some time. It is my due: and my knowing them cannot make the past either better or worse."

Without another word of dissent, won over completely by the reasoning, Mrs. Wylde entered upon the history of the past: she told it delicately, but without reservation. Mary sat still as a statue, and listened. She heard all. Her

mother had loved Rupert, but flirted with Guy, the heir. Guy became lord, and won her with a lie—an old prediction foretold it all. He represented Rupert as very unworthy. Unworthy he might have been, on the whole, but he was not so in that one matter: the lie was Guy's. Mrs. Wylde did not spare herself in the recital: *she* had urged on the marriage as eagerly as Guy; Alice, too, dazzled with the lord's rank and position, with the Pomeroy show and state, was less averse to it than she might have been. They were married, and were happy, and she, Mary, was born. Then Rupert re-appeared upon the scene, and Guy's treachery came out, and it turned his wife's heart against him. She fell into the habit of secretly meeting Rupert; in the walks: in the keep: anywhere. They met for the last time in the haunted room of the west tower. Guy found them there—and, in his passion, or perhaps partly in the struggle between the brothers, he killed Rupert.

"But—surely—my mother was incapable of real wrongdoing!" breathed Mary, from between her bloodless lips. "She could not have been guilty of it?"

"No, no, child, she was not. But, don't you perceive how it was? You know what the Pomeroy's are. In their pride—especially as regards their wives, for the Pomeroy women have ever been honourable—they looked upon her conduct, in permitting those meetings, as being just as bad as guilt. At first, the truth was not known, for she—in her own pride, I suppose—would deny nothing and confess nothing: and people judged her as they pleased. The worst feature in it all was her treachery to Guy, in becoming a partisan with his brother against him. It was done in the indulgence of her temper: nothing more. I cannot excuse her, Mary. Though she was my daughter, I never did that: and she knows it."

"Yes, I perceive," murmured Mary. "Papa was treacherous first, out of love for her; he won her by treachery; and mamma was treacherous later, out of anger. And it ended in a dreadful tragedy that has entailed a lasting scandal on the Pomeroy's, and a stain upon me. Grandmamma, I understand it all now."

Mrs. Wylde lay with her eyes shut, holding Mary's hand. The girl had leisure to reflect in the silence. So long did it last that one might have supposed Mrs. Wylde to be asleep. Not so, however. She suddenly carried the young hand to her lips and kissed it.

"And that is why Rupert does not consider me fitting to be his wife!" exclaimed Mary then, starting out of her reverie. "Well, it is sufficient cause: I, a Pomeroy, say it."

"I do not know whether Rupert does or does not think so: the doubt has often crossed me, that's all. But oh, child, believe me!" added the invalid, earnestly, "I have been taught by experience that those women are the happiest who keep from marriage."

"As the nuns do," dreamily remarked Mary.

"Ay, as the nuns do. But I was not thinking of nuns: rather of women who are in the world, but not of it, who are not ensnared by its deceits. Such a woman, for instance, as your aunt Joan. Joan had many offers; I can tell you that, Mary; but she chose the safer path."

Mary made no comment. Her thoughtful eyes were fixed on the blue sky through the open window, as if she might read a solution of some doubt there.

"But these self-denying women have their reward. Look at your aunt Joan. See how tranquil her days are! It is only other people's sorrows that trouble her; she lives to do what good she can for all, in her unobtrusive way. Joan's fate is to be envied in comparison with that of many married women. None, save themselves, know how great their trials often are; how solemn their responsibilities."

"But I am not like Aunt Joan," dissented Mary, in her straightforwardness. "If I am in the world, as you have just remarked, I must be of it. Do you understand, grand-mamma?"

"Quite, Mary."

"I could not live the self-denying life that Aunt Joan lives. Give me the world, and all that is in it: wealth, power, gaiety, social ties, and—yes—marriage; for why should I be left when other girls are chosen? or else take

me quite out of it, and give me the secluded life of the nun, with its tranquillity. It must be the one or the other for me, grandmamma."

"Very likely, child," carelessly replied Mrs. Wylde, whose strength was completely worn out; and she lay back and closed her eyes. Mary felt glad of the silence: her mind was preoccupied. Theresa brought in tea, and disturbed them.

The sun was drawing towards the west when Mary walked home, deep in thought, and sat down in her chamber. It was not yet quite time to dress. Her eyes fell upon a group of people in the garden below: her mother, the Lady of Pomeroy, and—yes—Joan. Joan must have returned this afternoon, then. At a little distance stood Annaline and Rupert. Rupert's head was bent as if his tones were whispered; her cheeks mantled with blushes as she listened, her eyes were cast down.

"I see it all," murmured Mary, her heart aching with its pain; "in this one day I have lived years. He will choose her, and make her his wife; and what is left for me?"

They were strolling towards the lake now. Mary's jealous eyes followed them, and took in all the features of the scene. The lowering sun flashed upon the water; the white swans sailed majestically about the green island that rose in the lake. Rupert seemed to be pointing out some feature of the landscape to her.

"Does he love her?" Mary went on, after a pause. "Or is he merely choosing her because he must needs marry as his forefathers have done? Would he have chosen me but for—that which I have heard to-day? Yes, I think so. He has learnt all about the great trouble, and deems me unworthy to be his wife."

Never, perhaps, during her whole life had such an expression of pain crossed Mary Pomeroy's face as sat on it now. Her eyes were closed, her hands pressed her temples.

"Yes," she said, looking up, as if deciding some mental debate, "I will go back to the convent and take the veil. Nothing else remains for me. And I shall be happy there—more so, perhaps, than I should be in the bustling world."

How happy I was when I lived at the convent! how loth to quit it. There will be opposition here, no doubt; but I shall have my own way."

- They were coming back now, the lovers; the ladies had
- apparently called to them: Rupert bending towards her, her conscious face half turned from his.
- "Yes, yes, all is clear to me," concluded Mary Pomeroy, in the tone of one whose resolution is taken. "It is neither Rupert's fault nor mine. Children must suffer for the sin of their parents: that is one of God's primary laws: I must suffer for the sin of mine. I will devote myself to God, and strive to follow Him in all ways, to live only for Him—and, perhaps, that may in some measure atone for their sin."

Rupert Pomeroy gave a state dinner that evening; his first; and the loiterers by the lake had been called to, with an intimation that it was time to dress. But, no sooner were the three ladies beyond the door of the garden, than Rupert suddenly put Annalino's arm within his own and marched her into the shady lime avenue. She timidly resisted, saying she must not stay. All the same to Rupert.

"I have wanted to talk to you since the morning, Anna-line, and have found no opportunity. You know, I presume, that that convent scheme of yours is at an end; that you remain for the present as Mrs. Pomeroy's guest?"

"Yes, Mrs. Pomeroy told me," was the reply: "it is very good of her. But oh, I wish you had allowed me to go. I am an intruder here; I do not like to remain."

Rupert smiled. The lime trees threw out a delicious scent: their leaves were of a more tender green than they would take later in the year; a nightingale suddenly sang out in one of the boughs.

"Do you remember, Annaline, one evening that you and I were together in the gardens at Florence and contrived to lose ourselves to the rest of our party?" he asked. "We were talking, amongst other subjects, of the song of the nightingale: you had never heard it, and I told you it was often heard at Pomeroy."

"I remember," she answered, in low tones.

"Do you like the song—now that you hear it?"

"I could listen to it for ever."

"And yet you want to run away from it."

"Not from that. I wish to run away because I am not wanted; I am only an interloper here."

"I told you recently that I was lord and master here, and my will was law," continued Rupert. "What if I say that you must not run away at all?—must remain here for life?"

Annaline trembled and would have turned. "No," she answered, "you must not say that. Pray, pray do not!"

"But I do say it," repeated Rupert, his voice changing to the deepest tenderness. "You know, you must know, how I have loved you, Annaline. I believe that we have loved each other."

She burst into tears, greatly agitated. "Rupert, it will never do; pray do not think of it. What would your mother say if she heard you?"

"My mother says she wants to give up her rule here to another. She says that she would rather welcome Annaline Hetley to her heart than any other girl in the wide world."

A light of joyful surprise shone in her glorious brown eyes, lifted for a moment to Rupert's; a brighter blush dyed her cheeks.

"Did she really say that?" she whispered. "But"—the blush fading—"you forget Mary. She says she is to be Lady of Pomeroy."

"Mary is fond of joking," said Rupert, lightly. "Mary does not care for me; nor do I for her. We are only cousins."

"But Mary does care for you?"

"Not in that way. Believe that, Annaline."

"Will you let me go in, Rupert? I have to dress?"

"I cannot help that. You have not given me an answer. My darling, I wait for it. Will you be my wife?"

She turned her face upon the arm that sheltered her, and gently wept out her emotion. Rupert needed no assurance in words: he saw, perhaps he had long seen, how she loved him.

"Will you grant me one little boon, Rupert?" she prayed in the midst of his caresses and her happy tears. "Do not make it known whilst I remain, here. It might annoy Mrs. Pomeroy. I fear she does not like me."

"I would rather it were not known just now, except to my mother and yours," avowed Rupert, thinking of Mary and her wasted hopes. "So be it, Annaline."

CHAPTER VII.

RIVALRY.

IN the banquet-hall sat a goodly company. Some such a company as you saw in it many years before, reader, only that that assembly was more numerous than this. Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, had sat at the table with his vain and pretty wife; both of them unconscious of the terrible tragedy that was so soon to fall. Another lord headed the table now, his mother, Sybilla, facing him. The illuminated windows were beautiful as of yore; the wax-lights gleamed on the silver, on the rare flowers that decked the table, on the dresses of the ladies and their sparkling jewels. To the right of Rupert sat a stately marchioness; to the left, the dowager-mother of the Earl Sones, who had been so great a scapegrace in his young days, when he was Viscount Winchester. Very near to Rupert was Annaline Hetley; her sweet face all too lovely in its consciousness of what the afternoon had brought forth; her white muslin dress pure and simple as herself; much too simple for this occasion. Mary Pomeroy, little less beautiful than her successful rival, but with a thoughtful sadness in her deep grey eyes, was attired in costly white silk and lace. Joan wore satin of her favourite purple; Mrs. Pomeroy's sombre black was relieved this evening with white lace; and Sybilla, at whose side sat Father Andrew, rubicund and jolly, wore a robe of ruby velvet.

In due time the dinner came to an end, and Rupert bowed the ladies from the door as they swept away.

"I did not think it would be like this," whispered Annaline to him late in the evening, when he found her in a remote room.

"Like what?"

"All this grandeur. I never saw such beautiful dresses. Will it be often so at Pomeroy?"

"Not often. Generally we can be at our ease. I can wear a loose coat, and you last year's morning-gown."

"You are laughing, Rupert. I fear you feel ashamed of my gown to-night."

"Very much indeed," gravely assented Rupert.

"I do. It has made me feel uncomfortable. Not for myself," she added, raising her ingenuous eyes to his. "I have not been used to anything better. But——"

"But what?"

She did not continue. She could not say that it was in his eyes she wished to look well, not so very different from others. As she stood in silence, her face held down, her fingers opening and shutting her simple fan, and Rupert was gazing at her with a strange tenderness, Mary came up. Annaline looked up with a start.

"Did you want me?" she hurriedly asked.

"I do not want you;" and, for the life of her, Mary could not keep all contempt out of her tone, for her heart was sore. "Aunt Joan has been looking for you."

Away went Annaline. Mary, toying with her own costly fan, turned to Rupert.

"Tell me, Rupert. Are you going to make *her* Lady of Pomeroy?"

Rupert hesitated. It was an awkward question.

"Do not think I wish to annoy you; to recall what might have been," she hastily resumed, her eyes flashing. "I speak to you only as a friend, a sister—and the truth is always best."

"Mary, you know how I esteem you," he answered, meeting her words frankly. "I love you as truly as brother ever loved sister. But—you must be aware that even had

other circumstances been favourable, we should not suit one another."

"Be honest," flashed Mary. "Tell the truth. It is not for that you reject me: but for that—that trouble connected with my father and mother: and which has left its stain upon me."

"No! On my sacred word of honour, it is not!" he replied, gathering some of her own excitement. "Believe me, that never did, or could weigh with me."

"Then," she slowly said, all the pride of her race rising to her countenance, "it is the girl herself who has cast her coils around you. Rupert, I am not thinking of myself; my lot in life is now chosen. It is of you I am thinking; for you I am pained."

"I do not understand, Mary."

"That you should for a moment think to throw yourself away upon this girl. A mésalliance——"

"That will do, Mary. The Hetleys are not inferior to ourselves; Annaline's training and education have been equal to your own: are you wilfully blind, that you do not see it? Let the topic cease. Shall I take you back again?"—offering his arm. But she drew a step away, facing him as before, and talking rapidly.

"Do you consider what her father is—and has been? A man always in debt—who would hardly have existed at all but for the generosity of Lord Essington; who was saved from coming quite to grief by Uncle Leolin's getting him that post at Florence. As mamma has remarked, Francis Hetley is next door to an adventurer."

"Francis Hetley is a good and honourable man; one of nature's noblemen: let me tell you that, Mary. Poor? Yes, he is poor. It is his only failing."

"All the same, a daughter of his can never be a fitting wife for you. Go out into the world, and choose a better."

Condescending to accept his arm with the last retort, she walked with him through the rooms. "A goodly pair!—and many an admiring eye thought so."

Half hidden by the curtain of an open window stood

Annaline. Rupert did not see her. Mary did ; and cast a look of haughty condemnation upon her as she swept past. She was quite honest in her contempt. Putting herself out of the question, she, looking on with the distorted eyes of pride and prejudice, considered Annaline Hetley an unsuitable wife for the Lord of Pomeroy. Reared in wealth, in almost exaggerated consciousness of the state and station of the Pomeroy, Mary could only despise the shifts and slights that poor Francis Hetley had all his life encountered, and regard him and his children as entirely different from her own order. That such a marriage would be fatal to Rupert, and that he ought, if possible, to be saved from it, she heartily believed. Annaline caught the look of scorn given to her. She shivered with pain ; her heart turned sick. Rupert, instinct too surely whispered to her, would never be allowed to fulfil his engagement with one so despised by his family.

“ Will you dance a quadrille with me, Annaline ? ”

She started from her reverie to see his face bending over her, to hear his low-breathed tones, so full of music. A quadrille had been proposed by the younger people, not many of whom were present. Rupert, as host, had been doing ceremonious duty all the evening ; he considered that he might be allowed to satisfy himself in the matter of choosing a partner.

“ I cannot dance to-night,” said Annaline, shivering slightly.

“ Not with me ? ” he softly whispered, persuasion in his face and tones. And Annaline yielded.

That one quadrille over, the guests departed, one set after another. The Dowager-Lady Sones remained last : her servants were tardy. But the carriage was soon announced, and Rupert took her down to it.

“ The most delightful evening the abbey has known since the old, old days,” she said, as he placed her in it. “ Thank you for your civility to an old woman. You will make a true chief of Pomeroy.”

Rupert laughed, shook hands, and the carriage drove out of the gateway.

At the same moment he heard the sound of a carriage approaching it. Somewhat surprised, he stepped outside.

Yes, it was so. Nay, unless the moonlight deceived him, *two* carriages were in view. Rupert mentally wondered who the advancing guests could be.

"Have they mistaken the hour, and are coming to dinner at midnight?" he lightly remarked to Father Andrew, who was by his side, about to say good-night.

Up rolled the vehicles; two post-carriages from the Crown Hotel at Owlstone, laden with people within and luggage without; and stopped. Leolin Pomeroy, Lady Anna, their three children, and some attendants.

"Can you take us in, Rupert?" asked Leolin, stepping out.

"I should think so; heartily glad to do it," warmly responded Rupert, as he shook his uncle's hand. "But, have you dropped from the moon?"

"We have dropped to-day from London," said Leolin, in low tones. "I'll tell you about it presently."

Rupert gave his arm to Lady Anna; she looked fatigued, subdued. The two little girls and their brother seemed more quiet than children generally are.

"Is anything the matter?" involuntarily asked Rupert. But just then his mother came forward to welcome her unexpected guests, and the question fell unheeded.

Leolin soon explained, Lady Anna having gone to prepare for a hastily arranged meal. Upon arriving this morning in the metropolis, for they had crossed by the night mail from Calais, they drove to Berkeley Square, where they were expected on a visit. There they found sad tidings, and the house in commotion. Lord Essington had died the previous evening of the epidemic then raging: his mother and sister had flown from it in distress and alarm.

"The news half stunned us," continued Leolin, who stood the centre of the curious and commiserating group: Mrs. Pomeroy, Joan, Annaline, Rupert and his mother. "What to do in the emergency, I hardly knew. The house in which poor Essington lay dead might not be safe for my wife and children; neither might London itself be. One is apt to be

careless about these epidemics; but when they are brought home to our own doors we realize their danger. I told Anna we had better come straight on here; you would excuse our taking you by storm under the circumstances; and we drove off to the station hotel for breakfast. But we missed the train, and had to travel by a later one. Anna said we ought to remain at Owlstone for the night, as it was so late——”

“Oh no,” interrupted Rupert. “It was better to come here, Uncle Leolin.”

“So I thought, Rupert. She is terribly cut up about her brother. It is not only his death, you see, but its suddenness. Poor Essington! It must be a sad blow to his mother.

Then for the first time he turned and recognized Annaline.

“Is it you, child!” he cried, bending to kiss her. “Great scandals we have been hearing of you, little runaway—proposing to convert yourself into a governess! Your father did not quite like the idea of it. Wanted some pocket-money, I suppose. Well, you won’t have to teach for that now.”

“Not have to——?” stammered Annaline, in dismay, believing that Rupert’s proposal must have become known in some untoward manner.

“Surely not,” returned Leolin, looking at her. “It would have been slightly out of place, I take it, for Miss Hetley to be teaching; yet more so for the Lady Annaline.”

A pause. Annaline’s lips parted; her colour went and came. Joan was the first to recover her memory.

“Why, yes,” she said. “Your father succeeds to the title, Annaline, as Lord Essington leaves no son.”

“Of course he does,” added Leolin. “Frank Hetley is now Earl of Essington. He was telegraphed for at once.”

Rupert glanced at Mary from between his half-closed eyelids. It was as much as to say—How needless were your taunts: what of her position now?

So Mary understood it: Crossing over to him, she drew him aside.

"Heaven is with you—and with her," she said. "There is no mistaking it."

"I trust so," answered Rupert. "But," taking her hand in his, "my mind cannot be at peace as long as you are at war with me. Oh, Mary, let us be the friends we used to be! There is no reason why we should not be. Our affection for one another remains just the same, and may remain the same for ever: that of true friendship. *There never was love on either side.* Your own heart must tell you so."

"I never said there was—or thought it. Had there been love on mine, I could not have abused you so freely," shrewdly added Mary. "In that case, I might rather have—how does Shakespeare put it?—have let 'concealment feed upon my damask cheek.' The cheek is less damask than hers, Rupert."

Her tone had changed to a light one, with a touch of humour in it; and Rupert felt thankful. Though perfectly well aware that Mary was not in love with him, that she never had been, for he knew the signs of love too well to fear that, the mood she had been indulging had brought him the greatest discomfort, also some self-reproach. Reproach that he could not love her, and did love another.

"I was brought up to think of myself as the future Lady of Pomeroy: and I should have liked to rule," she freely avowed. "But we might not have got on well, altogether, Rupert: so perhaps things have happened for the best. I should have wanted my own way too much."

"And I should have wanted mine," laughed Rupert, his countenance bright with the change this long-standing perplexity had taken.

"Yes: you will exercise power, just as your ancestors exercised it, unless I am mistaken. And that's why you have chosen that inane girl," added Mary, who could never help speaking out exactly what she thought. "You think she won't have a word to say for herself on any matter in which her opinion may not chance to agree with yours. And I quite believe you are right."

She was turning away to greet Lady Anna: who had

entered, and was sitting down to the refreshment she had chosen—tea. But Rupert held her hand.

“Then it is with us as it used to be, Mary? The same confidence between us; the same brotherly and sisterly affection; the same pleasant intercourse? Let it be so!”

“Yes,” said Mary—“for a short time. You and I will be the happy friends of yore, and I will find fault with you and rule you to my heart’s content.”

“Why for a ‘short’ time?”

“Ah, I cannot tell you that now, Rupert. Leave it to the future.”

“Three goodly children!” observed Father Andrew, who had been making friends with the young people—as he was sure to do with all children, and now stood behind the tea-table talking with Leolin and his wife. “And you have given them the old family names—Leolin, Mary, and Anna.”

“Ay,” said Leolin, “we leave grandiloquent names to our waiting-maids now.”

“Three goodly faces!” repeated the priest, looking at the children, glowing with the hue of health. “Vienna seems to be more favourable to your offspring than Pomeroy was, Lady Anna.”

Lady Anna lifted her eyes to his: a great thankfulness in their depths replacing for the moment the recent sadness which her brother’s death had brought.

“All things are more favourable to my children now, father, than they were in the days at Pomeroy. I praise Heaven for it every hour of my life.”

The priest knew perfectly well what she was recalling—the old trouble which Leolin had worked, touching the succession: or, rather, which he had attempted to work. But that mistake was over and done with long ago: and the later years of Leolin Pomeroy’s gentle wife had been full of sunshine.

“Shall I murmur at my lot?” asked Mary Pomeroy of herself as she laid her head upon her pillow that night, and

thought of the turn affairs had taken. "Surely not. I believe what grandmamma says—that our destinies here are marked out for us. All the events of life; great and small, even those we regard as the most trivial, are ordered by God. It is not decreed that I should be Rupert's wife—and if I rebel at the decree, it is not for himself, but for the place and power that would have been mine. We have been only brother and sister; no other feeling has ever swayed either of us; therefore, to marry would have been wrong. Esteem, friendship, plenty of that between us, but no love. No: it simply *could not be*.

"She will make him a better wife than I should have made," she went on, after a pause. "She is meek and yielding, and will not have a wish of her own apart from his. I should have followed my own will, and taken my own way; for I am a true Pomeroy, just as Rupert is; and there might have been a constant struggle for the mastery. Or, if Rupert, in his chivalry, had yielded to me, he would not have been happy. No, it would never have done for two Pomeroyes to come together, and Heaven has been wiser than we were—that Heaven which I shall hereafter alone serve, and which will most assuredly give me the blessing of peace."

CHAPTER VIII.

COMING HOME.

HAD Abbeyland ever been so gay before? Not in our recollection. The once gloomy windows of the abbey were thrown open to the sunshine; troupes of servitors waited in the gateway. Old Jerome, his white locks scanty with age, had hobbled round from the keep to head them. Bridget, chattering to him as usual, had put off her black, which she was wearing for old Naoni Rex, who had died a month

before, and looked resplendent in green and violet. All Abbeyland was astir. For Rupert, Lord of Pomeroy, was bringing home his bride.

What a contrast, if only in the matter of weather, with that day, not far short of a quarter of a century before, when Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, had brought home his! You cannot have forgotten it; or how the elements seemed to make war with one another, as if they would thunder forth denunciations on the marriage. To-day, all was peace and sunshine. The calm blue sky was without a cloud; the blue sea looked as though it could never be treacherous. Certainly if the terrific storms of that day were taken as an augury of evil for the bridegroom and bride, the brightness of this might be looked upon as a harbinger of good.

But this was not the day of the marriage. The ceremony had taken place in London some ten days ago. The world was growing older, if not wiser, and Rupert did not think it absolutely necessary to keep up all the Pomeroy customs to the letter, or to make an inconvenient rush to the abbey the moment the nuptial ceremony was over.

Annaline was married from the old house in Berkeley Square—her father's now. It was a quiet wedding; made chiefly so on account of the recent death of Lord Essington. The present earl, modest, kind-hearted, and as little self-asserting as he had ever been when Frank Hetley, had absolutely offered to give up the use of that house to the late earl's mother; neither he nor his equally unselfish wife liking to take it from her. But old Lady Essington returned a haughty refusal, very bare of thanks. She and Geraldine were amazed, mortified at the unexpected turn affairs had taken, and despised Frank Hetley as they had never despised him yet. As if poor Frank could have helped his cousin's death, or could help being next in succession. Leolin Pomeroy remarked that Lady Essington's refusal had been made "in temper;" she and Geraldine must have repented of it ever since; and he only hoped they would not be in a hurry to swoop down on Berkeley Square with professions of friendship, and worry the new earl and countess out of their tranquillity. "

Guests had gone up with Rupert to be present at the marriage ceremony: the Lady of Pomeroy—lady for the last day of her life; Joan, Leolin, and Father Andrew. Father Andrew had never been in London but once, in his early life; he enjoyed the sight all the more now, and would be sure to talk of its wonders as long as he could talk of anything. "I married the lord's father and mother," proudly observed the priest at the wedding-breakfast; "it would have seemed hard had he not asked me to help to marry himself." Major Barkley had come many miles to be present.

Rupert carried away his bride, and the others returned to Pomeroy. Ten days had gone by, and now the bride and bridegroom were expected home.

During this slight interval, certain changes had taken place in the interior economy of the abbey. Mrs. Pomeroy had left it for ever; and Sybilla had returned to her former abode in the south wing. Poor Mrs. Wylde, drawing very near her end now, had made one final appeal to her daughter to go home to her that she might be with her at the last. Rather, perhaps, to her surprise, all former appeals having been so peremptorily rejected, Mrs. Pomeroy acquiesced without a murmur.

"I was going to propose it to you, mamma," she said. "I shall be glad to quit the hateful abbey, in which I never had anything but trouble and sorrow, and make your house my home for the future."

"Child, this is glad news," spoke Mrs. Wylde, a gleam of pleasure lighting up her worn face. "And what of Mary?"

"I know not—and care not,"—and Mrs. Pomeroy's voice and face were as hard as a very subdued woman's can become. "But for Mary's sake I should have quitted the abbey long ago; it was in her interest alone I remained. I might have spared my pains."

"You speak as if you were grieved, Alice?"

"Grieved? Grieved is not the word for it, mother. I have not been very grateful to you in many ways and at many times; but I never showed to you the ingratitude

that my child is showing me. She wants to take the veil."

"Ay, she has told me so," said the dying grandmother.

"Told *you*!"

"Yes; and I have talked to her. Her duty at present is with you, Alice; but to the convent she seems determined to go; her happiness lies in it, she says. Possibly a middle course may be found. And later, when you have reconciled yourself to the idea, or, perhaps, when you are no longer here to need her, she may fully retire to it and dedicate herself wholly to God. Leave all things in His hands, child."

But this has been a digression—and yonder come the bride and bridegroom.

Who so elated as old Jeffs, the state coachman to so many of the Pomeroy lords! He sits his box proudly, his four greys well in hand: though old, he is a good whip yet. No failure to-day. The fine horses are in the best of tempers; the skies are bright and the roads are smooth. Jupiter, seated on Olympus, receiving the homage of his court, never felt more self-consequent than Jeffs, perched on his box-seat to-day.

"Do you see them, my darling?" asks Rupert, bending his head to the blushing face beside him, as he directs attention to the villagers on either side the road, eagerly saluting the carriage. "See how glad they are; how true their welcome! It is an earnest of what our future shall be—theirs and ours. We must never cease to promote the welfare of these poor people."

"Never, Rupert."

But Jeffs is taking the carriage swiftly up the approach, and, here they are at the great gateway, lined with expectant servitors. Rupert alights and hands out his wife; she wears blue silk and the prettiest white bonnet ever seen. The maids throw down their flowers for her to walk upon. Old Jerome advances a step; his white locks flowing, his hands raised as if in benediction; tears of joy run down his furrowed cheeks, his voice is tremulous as he speaks his welcome.

Rupert thanks him and shakes his hand. He shakes other hands that are held out. There stands Bridget, all green and violet; Mrs. Rex the housekeeper, old now, in stiff grey brocade; Cox, the custodian; they are all there. Father Andrew comes forward in full bloom. Annaline, shyly blushing, follows her husband's example, and timidly puts out her hand.

Then Rupert leads her upstairs into the midst of the family gathered there in greeting: Sybilla, Joan, Mary; and Leolin and his wife, whose stay is drawing to a close.

"Mother, why did you do this?" asks Rupert in pained tones, when he discovers the changes she has made. "Why did you go back to the south wing?"

"Because I like it, and feel most at home in it, Rupert, and because it is now my proper abode."

"Annaline and I have been hoping to keep you with us."

"And you will keep me: shall I not be under the same roof? No, my children," she added, affectionately taking their hands in hers, "we must not be quite together: you must have your household, and I mine. Joan has taken so great a fancy to you both that she intends to be with me very often—and you will have to take care that you do not get too much of our company."

"And how is it, Mary, that you have left the abbey— you and your mother?" questioned Rupert: as he stood with Mary-Pomerooy later at the open window.

"Mamma wished it. Grandmamma wants her."

"And what is this rumour that I hear about yourself?" he resumed, bending his concerned eyes upon her. "Surely you are not thinking of giving up the world?"

"How did you hear about it?" returned Mary.

"Lady Anna spoke of it in a letter to Annaline. cannot be true."

"It is true, Rupert. I must be in the world and of the world, or I must be out of it: and I have chosen the latter. I am beginning to think it is my true vocation."

"But why?"

"Because I believe that I shall find my best happiness in it. I never was so happy in my life as when I was in the convent; not even when I was a wilful girl, ruling you and the abbey," she added, laughingly. "I never left any place with so much regret. I am going to it to-morrow. I only waited to see you and Annaline."

Turning, she held out her hand. Lady Annaline came to her at once in answer.

"I have been telling your husband that I am going into the convent," said Mary, passing her arm round Annaline's waist. "But I am not there yet; I waited to say a word of welcome to you both, to wish you both all the happiness the world can give. Daily I pray that Heaven's blessings may rest upon you."

There ensued a pause of emotion. Rupert broke it.

"I never expected to hear this news, Mary. Though I have gained a wife, it seems I am to lose a sister."

"Don't make too sure of losing me," returned Mary, with a touch of her old sauciness. "It is not to be yet. Mamma was so angry at what she calls my ingratitude, and grand-mamma read me so severe a lecture about the duty children owe their parents, that I came to a compromise. The convent will be my home; but at present I shall not take any vows, and can come out when I choose. The White House will see me every day: and you now and then at the abbey."

Annaline clasped her hands in pleasure. "I was afraid——"

"You were afraid of all sorts of silly things," said Mary, smiling at her, "and especially afraid of me. There is no need to be, Annaline."

Leaning across Rupert, Mary kissed her. "It is just as I hoped," whispered Rupert.

"For a little time," answered Mary; "how long or how short a time, I know not. And then I shall bid you and the world adieu for ever."

"Do not anticipate it. It may never come."

"Do not attempt to dissuade me, Rupert; it would be nothing less than a sin," she said, correcting him. "You

